JUNE 1

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C.K.SHAW · CARL RATHJEN

ARGOSY

RED STAR MAGAZINE 6-1

WEEKLY

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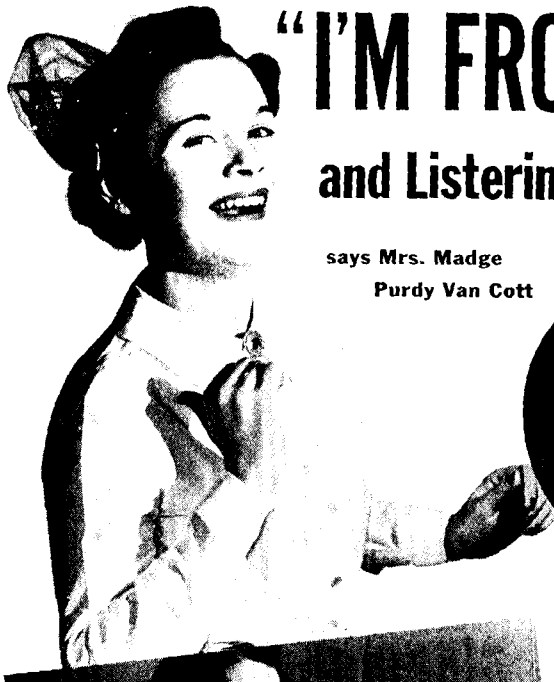

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America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 299 CONTENTS FOR JUNE 1, 1940 Number 4

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

A RED STAR *Magazine*

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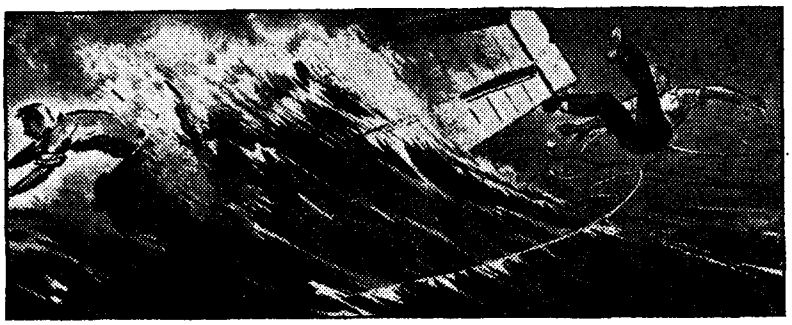

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28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
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31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
6.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
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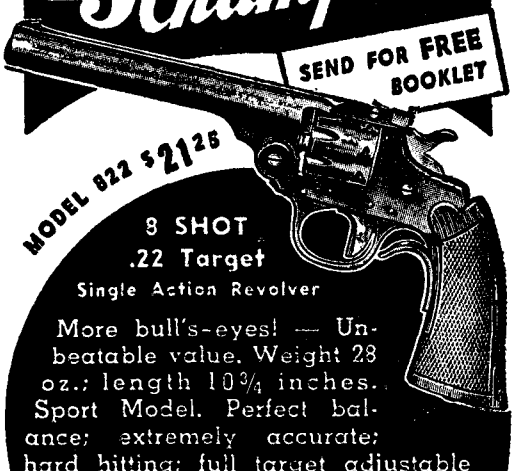

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Dr. Kildare Goes Home

By MAX BRAND

Author of "Young Doctor Kildare," "Calling Dr. Kildare," etc.

Was ever a man of medicine more widely loved, more unsparing of himself than young Jimmy Kildare? We doubt it. A broken bone, the cry of a baby, the anguish of a despairing heart—all are the same to this compassionate, profoundly understanding young interne. And now, out of hours, he must save a helpless town and forestall an appointment with death

CHAPTER I

YOU CAN BE DOCTORS

WHEN the head of the hospital, that hard-faced Roman, Doctor Carew, joined himself to their famous diagnostician, Leonard Gillespie, the rest of the staff prepared itself for something important.

As the cortege moved down the hall, the way was led by the wheelchair of that white-haired old lion, Gillespie, who always looked as if he had just finished one battle and was hurrying to get into another fight.

Carew walked at one side of him and on the other was Doctor Stephen Kildare, whose age and country practice seemed to appear in the cut of his thread-bare clothes.

Behind the chair was young Doctor Kildare, carrying a sheaf of charts. Nurse Mary Lamont now hurried ahead to open the door to an infants' ward.

"Wait a minute," said Gillespie. "Kildare!"

"Yes, sir," said young Kildare.

"Back up," said Gillespie. "I don't mean you, baby-face. I mean somebody of importance. Doctor Kildare," he went on to the father, "before we go in there to look your experiment in the face, I'm going to tell you that if it runs on as well as it's started, I intend to publish your results."

"Publish? Publish?" murmured old Kildare. "No, Gillespie. It's kind of you but I wouldn't know what to do with a public appearance. I mean to say—"

"You and your modesty are out of this," said Gillespie. "In a small way it would make you famous, perhaps; but the main lesson is that country practitioners could benefit the whole world, as well as their patients, now and then, if they'd do what you've done: take notes on their work and their results.

"The work of all our doctors every day, with ten minutes to note it down, would be like the rain in the mountains that works its way to the sea, sooner or later—rivers of sound information, Kildare, to sweep filthy disease away and give us a clean world.

"But confound them they won't take time to make notes. . . Give me one of your books, Kildare!"

The old country doctor pulled out a small notebook and handed it over. Gillespie thumbed through a few of the crowded pages.

"Heaven help the man who had to

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"I want to talk to you," said Kildare. Young Carew was tense, unwilling to wait

read it," he said, "but just the same this is the sword that will win our battle for us. What started the good habit for you?"

"A bad, tricky memory," confessed the old man, and laughed a little, ashamed of himself, as they went on into the ward so filled with sun and whiteness that it glowed like a crystal.

"HERE we are with the seedlings," said Gillespie, looking over the rows of bassinets. "How quickly they grow up into trees, Kildare, and blights hit them in the leaf and the branch, until at last they decay at the root and go back to the earth that made 'em."

"After bearing a little fruit, now and then?" suggested old Kildare.

"That's where Jimmy gets it, eh?" demanded Gillespie. "That crackpot optimism of his that's always seeing saints and heroes wrapped up in human hides? . . . What's the matter with you now, young Doctor Kildare? What are you scowling about? Have I stepped on one of your sore toes? Can't you take it?"

"It's *that* that bothers me," said Kildare, pointing, and with his head canted a little to the side.

"What's he talking about?" asked Gillespie.

"It's the baby crying in the isolation ward next door," said Nurse Lamont.

It was rather a rhythm to be felt than a sound to be heard.

"I get it now," said Gillespie. "First time you've ever heard a baby crying, young Kildare?"

"I don't like it," said Kildare.

"Well, if he doesn't like it, why doesn't somebody do something about

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it?" demanded Gillespie. "What's the case, Jimmy?"

"Undernourishment, to begin with," said Kildare. "But there's an acutely infected throat, also, and the lab report is negative for a streptococcic infection."

"Look at that girl, Doctor," said Gillespie to old Kildare, as he pointed out Mary Lamont. "Every time your son speaks, she looks as if a bird were singing. Might be a swan song, one of these days. Wipe off that silly look, Lamont, and go check the sore throat in that ward."

As she hurried off, he added: "Getting so, around this hospital, that we don't even dare let the babies cry. Your boy mightn't like it."

Carew said: "We'll take one of the outstanding cases. Kildare, suggest one."

Young Kildare said to the ward nurse: "Let's have a look at Pete Douglas."

"Yes, Doctor," she said, turning.

"Do you know *all* the names of the babies in this ward?" Carew asked the interne.

"I believe so, sir," said Kildare.

The eye of the father brightened, but old Gillespie was snarling: "Yes, he spreads himself all over the hospital. Spreads himself thin. Has to know everything. Nose into everything. Patients can't have any privacy around this man's hospital. I wish you'd find me a new assistant, Walter."

"If I find one, you'll get rid of him in a day," said Carew, faintly smiling. He added to old Kildare: "How did you run into this cereal you've been using for baby formulas?"

"I ran into it in my kitchen," said the country doctor, with his mind and his eye still half on his son. "My wife cooked it; her mother had cooked it before her. Jimmy, here, was a scrawny baby; so I tried that cereal and it worked. I've kept on using it. It's not infallible but sometimes it turns the trick; and I've been keeping up with the vitamins of late years. They seemed to help."

"LISTEN to these brats crowing," said Gillespie. "Not like a ward of sick children at all. More like bullfrogs singing on a summer evening. What kind of bullfrogs d'you have out there in Dartford, Doctor?"

"All matched voices," said old Kildare. "You should hear 'em! Nothing but close harmony."

"I'd *like* to hear 'em," said Gillespie, "if you'll ever give me a chance and ask me out there. . . . Give me that baby, nurse!"

The nurse had returned with a small infant in her arms; she laid it in the lap of the diagnostician. It was a scrawny little specimen with a mist of red hair. It clenched its fists, now, and writhed its mouth wide open, ready to yell.

"Shut your mouth and lie still, Pete," said Gillespie.

"Look!" murmured the nurse, amazed, for Pete Douglas changed his mind about wailing and began to gape, open-mouthed, at the ugly old face of Gillespie.

"What's there to look at?" demanded Gillespie. "It'd be a pretty strange thing if I couldn't keep a Scotch baby from crying, wouldn't it? Tell me about this weighty Douglas, Jimmy."

"He's six months old," said young Kildare. "He came in here ten days ago badly dehydrated and we couldn't make him hold liquids. I tried father's formula. He's put on three pounds already."

"Good!" said Carew.

"Good? Not at all!" said Gillespie.

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"It's only barely medium, considering that he's a Scotch baby. . . . Kildare," he added, turning to the country doctor, "I *am* going to publish you and your grandma's cereal, whether you like it or not."

"Why—" began old Kildare, embarrassed and pleased.

"No, sir," cut in the son. "Not yet. We've still got to learn a lot about it."

"You see?" said Gillespie, pointing. "He thinks that there's only one doctor in his family. Well, he's right, and the one doctor isn't he. What's the matter? Why can't we publish results like this, young man?"

"We've had some failures," said Jimmy. "And Father hasn't cleaned up the record of the last three years. It's still in his notebooks."

"Will you give us that stuff, then?" asked Gillespie.

"I'll have it all in the mail inside of a week," he answered.

MARY LAMONT came rather breathlessly back into the ward. There followed her a tall, gloomy young man who wore a striped apron.

"What's this? Some kitchen help?" asked Gillespie.

"It's a new report on that throat case in the isolation ward," said the nurse.

"Who are you?" demanded Gillespie.

"Davison, sir," said the tall young man. "I'm the media man, in the laboratory, sir."

"I thought you looked something like a cook," said Gillespie. "Did Doctor Kearns give you the report for us? Let me have some details."

"The first swab didn't give altogether satisfactory results. It was a throat swab, sir. There were some organisms that seemed to resemble diphtheria bacilli."

"Is that what Kearns said?"

"Dr. Kearns was busy at the moment."

"So you took over and went ahead?"

"Yes, sir. I looked up the patient and got a nose swab. The results are perfectly clear. I spread the swab on Loffler's media and incubated it. The diphtheria bacillus was there."

"Diphtheria. I remember when that was a word to curdle the spinal marrow of a doctor," said Gillespie. "But I want to know something else, Davison."

"Yes, sir."

"Why the devil did Doctor Kearns turn over delicate and important work like this to you?"

"I specialized somewhat in this work, sir."

"Yes, yes. As a laboratory worker, very good, very good. Commendable industry and all that. But why in thunder does Kearns let this work be done by anyone other than a full-fledged doctor?"

"I *am* a doctor, sir," said Davison.

"A doctor? In a fifteen dollar a week laboratory job?" growled Gillespie.

"No, it's eighteen dollars, sir."

Gillespie closed his eyes.

"What is your school, Doctor?" he asked.

"Columbia, sir."

"Trouble with your studies?"

"Not particularly."

"Where did you stand in your class?"

"Number three, sir."

"Afterward you hung out your shingle and no patients came?"

"That was it, sir."

"I'm going to remember you, Davison," said Gillespie. "Though I don't know what good my thinking will do. How many millions of Americans prac-

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tically do without medical service, and how many ten thousands of young doctors fold up because they can't get started?

"Look, Carew! Here's the desert; and here's water. Bring the two together and you have life. But what can be done when—"

His voice stopped short; his hand paused in the middle of a gesture; for Pete Douglas had caught at Gillespie's forefinger and was holding it now in a strong and delighted grip.

There was a good deal of laughter over this. Under cover of it Kildare stepped up to Davison, who had drawn gradually back from the group as if he could not tell whether it were time to linger or leave.

Kildare said: "What's the matter, Jack? You look white. You look sick. Anything wrong with Joan?"

"She's pretty well," murmured Davison. "It was only—the way Gillespie glowered at me. I thought for a minute that my job was going out the window."

"It won't go out the window," said Kildare, staring at him and seeing things that did not meet the eye. "Another three weeks before the baby arrives?"

The gloomy face of Davison lighted. "That's right," he said. "You're the one that remembers things, Jimmy!"

Then Gillespie was making an uproar about something, with another infant in his arms that laughed through the storm. Kildare went back to him slowly.

This fellow Davison was getting something almost like hope and happiness out of eighteen dollars a week; twenty odd years of education repaid with eighteen dollars a week—two people crowded into a single room and a third life now to be crammed into the same quarters—and all of this happening to a man of real talent, a man of genius, perhaps.

It entered Kildare like a shadow; it made his heart as cold as a stone. The chill of it never would leave him so long as he had to remember the frightened face of Davison, the wan smiling of Joan.

There was a call for Dr. Carew. He was wanted at once in his office.

"You people have the luck," he said. "You can be doctors. I'm only an office boy. . . . Kildare, I want to talk some more about this. Come along with me and bring those charts. . . ."

"Get the rest of the reports and bring them on to Carew's office." said Kildare to Mary Lamont "He's going to be full of questions."

CHAPTER II

ORANGE JUICE FOR TWO

CAREW, hurrying with his quick, short steps, was first through the anteroom of his office, so bent on getting to his telephone that he had no eye for the people who were waiting.

But Kildare took note of a boy of eighteen or nineteen and a girl not much younger who rose up quickly from their chairs and with a frightened expectancy watched Carew cross the room.

Carew's secretary said: "Your son is here, Doctor."

"Let him wait," snapped Carew, throwing open the door of his inner office.

The girl and boy sat down again, slowly, glancing at one another with pain and with relief mingled, as if some necessary operation had been postponed. Their hands touched and that covert gesture conveyed a long message to Kildare.

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He carried her picture with him into the office where Carew already was snatching up a telephone. She was rather a pretty girl with high-arched, old-fashioned eyebrows, and there was nothing of 1940 about her. She seemed to have been created in an earlier age of stillness and of more quiet thought.

Sometimes a human life is written with an indelible ink that strikes almost through the page; but others, however charming, are in fragile characters, easily erased. She was like that, Kildare thought: easily erased, too dimly printed in the world's fabric.

In the meantime he laid out the charts on the desk.

The secretary appeared at the door as Carew rang off from a telephone conversation.

"Your son wishes to know whether he should wait or come back another day?" she asked.

"Tell him another day," answered Carew. "No, let him come in now. . . . Families have no sense, Kildare. They think a father is an institution, not a human being. . . . Now let's have a look at the chart of this baby, this what's-his-name."

"Pete Douglas? The chart is here."

The door opened.

"Come in, Willie," said Carew. . . . "Why should you bother trying to remember the names of the infants, Kildare?"

"I don't bother. But somehow names mean more to me than numbers. Besides, this Pete is a pretty tough fellow."

"Was he very ill, Kildare?"

"*Very* ill, sir."

"What formula was he on before you shifted him to your father's? . . . Willie, what do you want?"

"I'm afraid that I'll have to talk to you alone," said William Carew.

"Talk to me alone? Nonsense!" said Carew. "This is only a doctor. This is our Dr. Kildare. My son William, Kildare."

Kildare went over a few steps and shook hands, smiling, but he could not melt the stiffness out of the strict attention at which William stood. He seemed very much afraid of his father but still more afraid of that which had driven him to the office.

THERE was nothing unusual about this lad except the sense that he was under the whip and bound somewhere. This case had to do with the mind alone, but it seemed to Kildare to need a quick diagnosis.

"You can talk right out, Willie," the father was saying impatiently. "You've heard of Kildare, haven't you?"

"I'm sorry," answered William.

"Always wrong and always sorry," commented Dr. Carew. "What? Never heard of Kildare, the people's friend? . . . What did you say the first formula was, Kildare?"

"This one, sir," explained Kildare, pointing it out on the chart. "There's a protein content of fifteen percent, carbohydrate seventy-one, fat, three, and minerals over three percent."

"Seems sound to me. But you changed it? . . . Go on, go on, Willie! Let's have what's in your mind."

There was no answer from William.

Kildare said: "I've left half the report behind me. Sorry, sir. I'll come right back with it."

He gathered the charts into a quick stack.

"Wait a minute—don't go, Kildare!" protested Carew.

"I'll be right back, sir, with the rest of it," said Kildare, hurrying toward the door.

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He threw a glance at William as he went and the eye of the boy brightened with understanding. Then Kildare was in the anteroom.

Mary Lamont, with a sheaf of reports, was already there, talking, or trying to talk, to the girl who waited for William Carew. It was like Mary to have found the right person. It made him feel, not for the first time, that some sort of telepathic communication existed between them.

As he came up, a side glance from Mary indicated the girl to him as a person of importance.

"This is Dr. Kildare, Marguerite Paston," said Mary Lamont.

"How do you do, Doctor?" said the soft voice of Marguerite Paston; but her whole mind was fixed on the closed door of Carew's office. Whatever happened to young Carew inside that door was obviously happening to her, also.

Mary Lamont gave over the reports; at the same time her significant eyes were begging Kildare to pay more attention to the girl beside her. She was saying: "Paston is a *very* old English name, isn't it? Weren't they a great family back in the Middle Ages?"

The girl at last drew her attention away from the office door to answer: "*My* family is not great. We're simply West Siders. My uncle was Sammy Paston, the prizefighter."

Mary Lamont caught her breath.

"Well, that's all right, isn't it?" asked Kildare.

"I think it may be," said Marguerite Paston, with the same amazing frankness and quiet, "but I was simply pointing out that I'm not of a great family."

"You're not a West Sider," said Kildare. "They're all right, but you're not one of them."

"I was born three blocks from the hospital," she answered.

"But you've been away most of your life," he insisted, though Mary Lamont was shaking her head to indicate that this was the wrong track and that time was being wasted.

"I've been in a convent for a long time; that's why there's a difference in the way I talk," she admitted. She seemed to care about nothing but truth and wanted to have it as naked as a new-born baby.

Mary Lamont, in the near background, made a gesture indicative of delight and bewilderment, inviting Kildare to see that this was a different sort of creature.

"I knew Sammy; I knew your uncle just before the end," he said.

"Are you the one who took care of him?" she asked.

"I was one of them," he said.

SHE stood up. She was rather small but there was something about her that made her quite tall enough.

"You're the one they all talk about; you're—the doc?" she said. "I know you are. It's a sad sort of happiness, remembering all they've told me."

She smiled at Kildare, faintly, and the smile took a long time to go out. Mary Lamont, very bright of face, continued to adore this grownup child.

Then the door of Carew's office opened and young William stood on the threshold. Marguerite Paston forgot Kildare and all else as she listened, for the angry voice of Doctor Carew rang from his office, saying: "And don't come back again until you've got this silly nonsense out of your head."

William Carew waited, with the door still open, until his father had finished speaking his mind, though the boy must have known that everyone in the anteroom could hear what was said. After that he closed the door, turned

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slowly from it, and came on toward Marguerite.

He had the same look of tension that Kildare had noticed before, the same look of being under the whip and bound for a destination too far away to reach; but as he drew nearer to the girl he changed. He was even smiling as he picked up her coat and began to help her into it.

Mary Lamont, close to Kildare, was murmuring: "She's lovely, Jimmy. Isn't she lovely? Did you ever see anyone half so lovely? They adore each other, don't they?"

"They do," said Kildare through his teeth.

"What's the matter, Jimmy?"

"I don't know. There's something like murder in the air . . ."

Marguerite Paston was coming back to say goodby to them, smiling.

"I want to talk to you," said Kildare.

"Thank you, Doctor," replied young Carew, "but there's a very important engagement ahead of us."

"I'm *so* sorry," agreed the girl.

"I know what your engagement is," said Kildare.

"But you can't—" began William Carew.

"Hush!" said Marguerite to him, softly, and she watched Kildare.

"So you'll talk to me now, won't you?" asked Kildare.

"Yes, Doctor," said Marguerite.

He went out with them, past the startled, questioning eyes of Mary Lamont.

"There's a back room in a saloon across the street," said Kildare. "Do you mind going to a place like that? We can be alone there."

"I don't mind," said the girl.

Young Carew continued to stare, bewildered. Then a loudspeaker down the corridor announced: "Doctor Kildare wanted in Doctor Gillespie's office. Urgent. . . ."

"That's the great Gillespie and of course you'll have to go," said Carew. He seemed relieved. "We'll see you another time, Doctor."

The loud speaker repeated: "Doctor Kildare wanted in Doctor Gillespie's office. Urgent!"

"This is more urgent than anything Gillespie has to do," said Kildare, and his words straightened young Carew again. Only the girl seemed impervious to shock.

FROM the warmth of the hospital they passed out into New York's winter, gray as twilight, with a dust of freezing rain that drew the sky down to the city pavements.

A big truck loaded with fir trees went past them as they waited for a green light at the corner. It trailed a clean fragrance behind it.

"There goes Christmas," said Kildare, surprised. He looked away into his thoughts. Every month since he came to the hospital had been longer than a long year.

The girl said: "There aren't any seasons in a hospital year, I suppose."

"That's good," agreed Kildare. "That's what I was thinking, without words."

The boy watched the two of them, rather gravely amused to see someone else tasting the quality of Marguerite. So a collector shares his best vintage with a jealous delight.

As they went across the greasy street, Kildare was thinking that she had lived double her years in that quiet mind of hers. She was unlike Mary Lamont: for the Scotch girl was full of vigorous living, color, and glow, like a brilliant oil painting; but the

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Paston girl was like a book of drawings, a little dim with time, in which the master has revealed himself.

If he loved Mary Lamont, everyone could understand his love and envy him. Her eye had the flash and her voice the sound to which men respond instantly. She was no abounding hoyden, at that, but she almost seemed one, compared with this quieter music.

"When you were born, your mother wasn't very young," he said to her. The words slowed her nearly to a stop and she looked at him, he felt, for the first time.

"That's true," she said. "I was born old."

She kept on looking at Kildare and at her new conception of him. In any other person it would have been staring; but in her it meant simply that her mind was turned fully toward him.

As they reached the family entrance of Mike's saloon he said: "This isn't the place for you; but it's the nearest."

"Oh, but places don't matter, do they?" she asked.

He kept thinking of this as he opened the door and let them go in before him. The tawdriness of the back room of Ryan's place was freshly revealed to him. It was scrubbed up every day but soap and elbow-grease cannot always remove the uncleanness of time. It was like a woman's old hat, a dead fashion since the days when people liked varnish and gilt.

An uproar of two men in loud argument came from the bar even though the door between was closed. Kildare looked guiltily at the girl.

"It doesn't matter at all," she said.

He pulled open the door. Mike himself was at it with Toppy Graham on the subject of the immortal long count over Tunney in the Chicago fight.

"Save it, Mike, will you?" asked Kildare. "Maybe you're both right."

"Sure, Doc, sure!" said Mike Ryan. "But there's no more sense in Toppy than there is in an old bell. It can't make only but one noise. Will you have something, Doc?"

"Will you drink something?" Kildare asked them, turning.

They would have nothing. Mike came bustling from behind the bar to make sure. Said Toppy Graham: "How's McAllister doin', Doc?"

"Temperature's gone; he'll be all right," said Kildare.

"We've been missing the old fool," remarked Toppy. "Will you have a look one day at my kid that's off his feed, Doc? He was named after you."

"He was named four years before you ever seen the Doc, you lyin' liar, you," said Mike.

"I would of changed the name if it hadn't been right, though," said Toppy, calmly.

"Bring him around," said Kildare. "A beer for me, Mike, if you please."

MIKE had bundled himself through the doorway. He blinked and held up his hands when he saw the two who stood close together, utterly out of place.

"Ah, but look what we have here!"

"They don't want anything, Mike," said Kildare.

"Sure they want something," decided Mike. "There never was a child born that didn't want something to make him thirsty or to quench it. Maybe it would be a drop of orange juice, my dear?"

"I'd like some very much," said the girl.

"Of course you would," said Mike, "and a splice of whiskey to smack your lips on it?"

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Kildare shook his finger at Ryan but the girl was saying: "Yes, thank you."

"Ah, you see?" said Mike. "The good ones *know* what's good! And what will the young gentleman have?"

He would have the same thing; and still his eyes were asking Marguerite a question.

"And a bit of a snack of something with it?" asked Mike. "A crumb of cheese on a cracker? Or a slice of a smoked sausage."

"I'd like that, thank you," she said.

"Aha, Doc," cried Mike. "The good ones *always* know."

. . . She made a slight face when she tasted the drink.

"Don't take it," said Kildare.

"No, I'll manage it," she said.

"But why?" insisted young Carew.

"For Mike?" suggested Kildare.

The girl smiled at him. Her eyes roved slowly from his forehead to his chin and seemed to like all that they saw.

"I'm afraid that we haven't much time," said William Carew.

"Let's have all the time he can spare us," said the girl. "You have some hard things to say, haven't you, Doctor?"

"You're making them easier," he told her. "And yet it's harder, too. When I first saw you, I thought it was the usual thing, but I see that it's more than that."

"I don't quite follow," said William. "Usual?"

"Love, and all that," said Kildare.

"Ah, really?" said the boy, and put a cold distance instantly between them.

"But he knows, dear," said Marguerite Paston.

"I don't like all this very much," answered Carew. "I'm sorry, but we have some things to do, you know."

"You've only one thing to do," said Kildare. "Can't it wait just a little?"

CHAPTER III

WAIT A LITTLE, DEATH

"ONE thing?" Carew echoed. "*One* thing?" He lost a little color and sat up straighter. He was a good athletic type, lean and hard from constant exercise. His face was drawn a bit as it is when a man is in perfect training.

The girl said nothing, but watched Kildare and Carew in turn as if the scene had little or nothing to do with her.

"You're nineteen and she's seventeen?" asked Kildare.

"That happens to be right," admitted Carew, still drawing away from this unwelcome intimacy.

"People tell you that's too young for marriage, don't they?"

"Marriage?" repeated William, lifting his eyebrows a bit.

"You went to your father to tell him that you had to get married, didn't you?"

This lifted young Carew almost out of his chair. He stared at the girl and she, still looking from one of them to the other, smiled at them both.

"Yes," she said.

Carew settled back gingerly into his chair.

"Your father told you it was nonsense. He probably said that you should go back to school and forget all about it," went on Kildare.

"I think you mean this kindly," said the boy, "but I don't see what's gained, actually, by—"

He left the final words of the sentence unuttered. His meaning was clear enough without them.

"What I want to suggest," said Kil-

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dare, "is that other people have to wait, and wait, and wait. Some of them manage it pretty well. Let's say that they're the cold-blooded horses. Some of the thoroughbreds won't stand it. They break away and bolt."

He found the boy staring hard at him, silently. He went on: "Perhaps I'm one of the cold-blooded people. But I have to wait and then keep on waiting. I don't know for how many years. But I'm managing to stand it. Does that give me a right to talk to you?"

A heavy silence came over them and continued for a moment. The girl suddenly had forgotten Kildare; she was closing herself into the world of William Carew.

"No, it doesn't give him a right to talk to us," suggested the boy. He flushed and turned quickly to Kildare. "I'm sorry," he said. "I don't mean to be rude."

"It's all right. Perhaps I understand," said Kildare. "When there's a game, one ought to stick by the rules. But this isn't a game?"

The girl smiled a little, and still looking only at Carew she answered quietly: "No, it's not a game."

"So you can make up your own rules as you go," suggested Kildare.

Neither of them answered. They remained lost in one another: not with the helpless, open stare of infatuation, but as if they were reading in one volume glorious and familiar words.

Kildare, pushed a thousand leagues away from them, drew a deep breath and continued:

"Ordinarily, a man and a woman have to work hard and wait a long time before they can be together. Perhaps that's because love itself isn't the whole thing to them."

"What else is there that matters?" asked Carew.

"Well, there are the things that come *out* of love," answered Kildare. "Children, and a home, and all that, you know?"

"I know," whispered Marguerite Paston.

"But if those things don't count so much, it leaves the man and woman free," said Kildare.

"Free?" she repeated, lifting her head a little to greet the thought.

"Because there is nothing that can keep you apart," said Kildare. "It isn't a game and therefore there aren't any rules, you see."

"But with everyone set against us," said the girl, "what is there that could let us be together?"

"There is that appointment you intend to keep," said Kildare.

"What do you mean?" asked Carew, profoundly startled. "Appointment? With whom?"

"With death," said Kildare.

THEY forgot one another at last. Their frightened eyes turned on him. The girl slipped back in her chair with a white face.

"What have you done to her?" breathed Carew. "Marguerite, we'll get out of here; we'll get away from him."

"We can't run away—not from him!" whispered the girl.

"How did he guess?" asked Carew.

"There's not much guessing," said Kildare. "It's in the newspapers every day or two. They're always young. They've always found people against them. They won't meet secretly like a pair of criminals. They're proud of their love; it's the only good thing in the world. If they can't be happy and free living together, they'll be happy and free dying together."

Carew, holding the hands of the girl, said rapidly: "He's going to tell

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us what the rest of them say: that we're too young to know, that we don't understand, that life is a business, not a mere pleasure, that there is duty—"

"Hush, hush!" murmured the girl. "He won't say any of those things. Dr. Kildare, if you know what we can do, will you tell us?"

"Will you listen?" asked Kildare.

"Yes, yes—Oh, with our whole hearts we'll listen."

Kildare closed his eyes. "Thank God!" he said, and paused for a moment to let the tension dissolve.

"Do you see?" he heard the girl whisper.

"Yes. He's a friend!" said Carew.

Kildare looked out at them through a darkness of unhappy thought.

"Say whatever you please, and we'll listen," said Carew, now suddenly warm and eager with friendliness. "You can begin by telling us that we're young and silly. I hope you can prove it."

"I don't think you're silly," said Kildare. "Perhaps you're the only people who are right. Perhaps the rest of us are all too old and too far away. Does that make any sense? *You* understand what I mean, don't you, Marguerite?"

"I think I do," she said. "Have we made you unhappy?"

"No. I can take it, all right. That word 'love'—we all throw it around as if we understood it. I've wanted to marry three girls, at different times. But what have I ever known about love?

"I've been walking in the dark, compared with you two. I don't think you're foolish. I don't think lightning is foolish, either, when I see it strike. It simply never has struck me."

"There'll come a time—" began Carew. But the girl lifted a finger and stopped him.

"Most of us are non-conductors," said Kildare. "The electricity won't run through us. . . . Foolish? No, I envy you! You make me feel that I've never been more than half alive.

"There's no love I've ever dreamed of—there's nothing on earth—that could keep me from my work. That's all I love, really—my job, and a crotchety old white-headed devil who hates disease as he hates Hell-fire. . . .

"I envy you—but I want to keep you. That's all."

THEY had forgotten their own troubles. They sat close together, hushed, watching him, and there were tears in the eyes of the girl; yet her mind kept on working.

"Are you pretending a little?" she asked.

Even Carew glanced at her in surprise.

"Do you think I am?" said Kildare.

"Just a bit?" she asked. "To make your own life seem darker, so that what we have will be brighter, and rarer, and more worth keeping? All these people love you. There's a whisper that the doc can look through people and see all their troubles as you saw ours. Oh, I think you've darkened yourself a little for our sakes."

"Perhaps," said Kildare. "And perhaps I've failed."

The boy broke out suddenly, but in a hushed voice as if he were afraid that the outer world might hear him:

"You've been great to us. You're something for us to remember. And we haven't much. But you understand how it is? Suppose I get a ding-dong job at twenty a week and put Marguerite in the dark of a little railroad flat and give her only part of a life. That's no good.

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"Sometimes being poor is all right but sometimes it's like being dirty. It would be that way with us. I'd have to give up my education and that means I'd grow up into only half a man. We'd feel as if we'd done each other in.

"There was only one hope. That was in my father and that hope we had to check out today."

"Before you talked to him," answered Kildare, "did you plan what you were going to say, so that you'd be sure to get his attention?"

"You don't scheme and plan like that when you talk to your own father," replied Carew. "But he's hard. There's no changing him. There's not much kindness in him to make him want to understand."

"You're only part of what he's fathering," said Kildare. "He's fathering the whole hospital; he's fathering all the schemes of the great Gillespie; he's fathering the charity wards, worrying about pay for the nurses, fees for the doctors, beds for the patients. He's kind enough to stop his whole day in order to look into a small experiment in baby feeding.

"He's a great doctor but a worried man never seems either kind or important. It's the concerns of other people that make him seem hard."

"When you say that," murmured Carew, "it makes me feel that I've been a fool—a low, ungrateful fool."

"No. You're only a little impatient," said Kildare, "the way your father is. But ask him for an hour of his time, plan what you're going to say to him, make everything clear; and he's going to give you whatever you ask."

"He's not simply talking. He thinks it can be done," said the girl.

"Why, if there's only a *ghost* of a hope, we've got to take it," answered young Carew.

"You will?" exclaimed Kildare.

He dropped back in his chair and closed his eyes. He took a great breath.

"I thought for a while that I was lost!" he said.

CHAPTER IV

EMERGENCY CALL

BACK in the hospital, Kildare hurried to the offices of the internist, passed through the door over which hung the brass plate which announced: *Dr. Leonard Gillespie, Hours: 12 a.m. to 12 a.m.*"

In the big waiting room, over which Gillespie's body-servant, Conover, presided with the help of Nurse Parker, there was the usual crowd of rich men, poor men, beggar-men, and thieves who had come, some of them, half-way around the world; and the line flowed steadily in upon the diagnostician.

Kildare at once assumed, as his habit was, more than half the brunt of the work. To his eyes fell the reports and the charts of the cases as the patients were introduced, and his was the first quick attempt at diagnosis, his work to be checked by the great Gillespie.

For months he had been at it, opening every faculty wide to receive the flood of knowledge which the old man had stored up in a long life of observation, receiving a whole medical encyclopedia condensed and stingingly illustrated from the cases at hand, checked and rated for every failure of his memory—only now and then blessed with a word of praise, like a student who at the same instant is studying his courses and receiving endless final examinations in them.

The pressure, in fact, never ended as Gillespie kept driving with a ruthless hand. He made a brief pause in the flow of the line, now to say:

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"There was a beautiful thing here, half an hour ago, in the way of a tropical fever. You missed that, Kildare. Only a small thing, eh? But maybe it'll keep you from saving a life, one day."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Kildare.

"Sorry nothing!" cried Gillespie. "You act as if you had ten years ahead of you. You act as if time didn't matter!"

"No sir," said Kildare, sadly, "I know how terribly time matters."

"Bah! Wipe that look out of your eyes!" commanded Gillespie. "Be sentimental about other people but don't let me catch you moaning and mooning over me."

"Did you see the doctor this morning?" asked Kildare.

"I saw him. It doesn't matter what he says. If I have six months or a whole year, what difference does it make? A man with his wits about him sometimes has a chance to do a life's work in ten minutes.

"Six months? Why, Jimmy, you and I can do as much in six months as some of the halfwits can do in six decades. But it means that we've got to work.

"I've got to have all of you, day and night, both your ears, all ten of your eyes, and all of the hundred minds that keep wandering and flying away from the subject like so many moths. That fool of a Carew ought to know that.

"Or where were you just now? Looking at the sore thumb of an elevator boy, or comforting a homesick janitor, or bandaging a pair of weak eyes, or what?"

"A boy of nineteen and a girl of seventeen very much in love—" began Kildare.

"Rot! Calves and puppies!"

"—and heading toward a suicide pact—"

"Tripe! Words, words, words—that's all."

"—and rather happy about it," concluded Kildare.

Gillespie was hard hit by this.

"Happy about it?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir," said Kildare.

"You mean, a great love—springtime—star-dust—all that?"

"They don't care what happens, so long as it happens to them together."

"Then it's dangerous," declared Gillespie. "Anything can happen! Where are they? They've got to be stopped! Kildare, don't stand there like a fool! Bring those children to me! They've got to be stopped!"

"They're stopped already," said Kildare, smiling a little.

"*You* stopped them?"

"Yes, sir. They only need to get an hour of the time of a man who can solve all their problems."

"Can they get the hour?"

"I've told them how to do it. It only needs patience."

"That's why you're standing so much straighter, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't blame you," said Gillespie. "Ordinarily we can save only lives and limbs; but the other things—to save *that* is different, again. Ah, Kildare, there are times now and then when I think I wasn't altogether wrong in picking you—out of ten thousand!"

LATER that day, Kildare was saying to Head Nurse Molly Cavendish: "Can you tell me where Mary Lamont is?"

"What do you want her for?" said Molly Cavendish.

"For an experiment—" began Kildare.

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"What kind of an experiment?" demanded the Cavendish. "Holding hands, or what?"

"You're hard on me, Molly," he told her.

"I'm no first name to you, either," she said, "at least not when I'm in uniform. Besides, you ought to know that Nurse Lamont is off duty, now."

"Ah, I'd forgotten her hours," admitted Kildare. "You don't happen to know where she went, do you?"

"How should I know and why should I tell you?" snapped the Cavendish. "I hope you understand that the internes and staff doctors are strictly forbidden to have anything to do with one another?"

"Why do we all love you when you're such a trial, Molly?" asked Kildare.

"I'll do without your love," declared Molly Cavendish.

A big man with much jaw and very little eyes and forehead came down the corridor, his white trousers rustling from the swing of his stride. As he went by, he saluted Kildare and made an enigmatic sign.

"Tomorrow, Joe," said Kildare, smiling.

"Thanks, Doc," said Joe.

"He was asking you," stated Molly Cavendish, "when you would have a beer with him in McGuire's saloon. Wasn't that it?"

"Yes," admitted Kildare.

"Here's Dr. Gillespie," she said, "with the world to choose from and he picks out a boy to assist him—a mere boy, and one that runs around with common guttersnipes, mere ambulance drivers like that Joe Weyman. Why do you waste time on people like Weyman?"

"He's not 'people'. Joe is just himself," said Kildare.

"A hard-drinking, cheap, low, common creature. What do you owe a man like that?" demanded Cavendish hotly.

"I don't owe him my life—not quite, but almost," said Kildare. "But outside of that, he's as good a man as I know."

"As good as Carew or Gillespie, perhaps?" she asked, sardonically.

"Yes. Just as good, in his own way. But speaking of Mary Lamont."

"I'm not speaking of her."

"Didn't she tell you where she was going?"

"Am I a letter-box or something, for you two brats to exchange messages?"

"This is an emergency, Molly."

"What kind of an emergency?"

"I've hardly spoken to Mary for a week."

"It's your own fault for being such a fool, then," said the Cavendish. "But if you were to drop in on the poor young Davisons, God help the two of them, I wouldn't be surprised if you found your Mary Lamont there."

"What would we do without you, Molly?"

"Mind you," she called after him, "I'll have no more hand in these carryings-on!"

CHAPTER V

LOVE IS DEAF

THE Davisons lived in one room that looked on a ventilator shaft. They could have afforded something a little better, even on eighteen dollars a week; but they had to try to save and the last of their savings had gone to the buying of the baby's crib that stood in a corner of the room. It was half decorated with windings of satin, pink and blue.

In the next corner was a kitchenette;

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opposite to it three chairs huddled around a floor lamp which obviously represented the living room; and in the last corner was a couch, hardly wide enough for two. That was the bedroom.

Everyone was busy when Kildare came in. Joan Davison was laying the table, Mary Lamont worked over the gas stove, and Davison himself worked hardest of all in trying to fan the fumes of the cookery out the window to join the other cookery smells that wafted up the shaft.

"Hi, look!" called Davison. "Here's the young genius himself. You're getting more bumps in your forehead, Jimmy, to make room for the brains that Gillespie is pouring in."

"Those bumps are from beating my head against the wall," said Kildare. "Joan, go over there and lie down. I'll finish this. I know where the things are."

"No, I'm all right," said the girl. "You be a guest, Jimmy. Sit down in the living room and be a guest."

"That's the idea," said Mary Lamont. "Take her away and make her sit down. She's only in the way. . . . But give me whatever you've brought."

"Some ice cream," said Kildare, "and a bit of fresh orange juice."

"You see?" objected Davison. "He's always a doctor. He never forgets himself; orange juice—something alkaline—you see?"

"Finish cooking those chops, and then you're wanted," said Kildare to Mary Lamont. "I have to take you away."

"Wanted? In the hospital? Really?" she asked.

"Yes," said Kildare. "You come here with me," he added, taking Joan across the room.

She stretched out on the couch with a sigh. She was white and spent from the life she carried inside her.

"Stop being polite," said Kildare. "Close your eyes. Groan, if you feel like it."

At this, her eyes almost closed, but she kept watching him, smiling.

"Bless you, Jimmy," she said.

He took her hand and pressed a forefinger against her wrist.

"Don't do that," she asked him.

"Don't bother me," said Kildare. "Have you been getting out in the sun?"

"Yes, whenever it comes out and shines."

"Have you had to cry a lot?"

"Not in front of Jack."

"Otherwise, quite a lot?"

"I'm afraid so."

"And still a good deal of fear?"

"Not about myself; I'm not in the least afraid about myself, Jimmy."

"Only what will happen to the baby, and all of you?"

"OH, JIMMY, we only seem to be hanging to life by a spider's thread, and I'm afraid that the extra weight will break it."

"We're going to make that thread as strong as a steel cable. You hear me?"

"I hear you. I love hearing you. Over and over."

"Strong as a steel cable," said Kildare.

"So nothing can break it?"

"So nothing can break it."

"And Jack won't hate me?"

"Not too much."

"I mean, because I'm causing him all of this trouble, and sort of dragging him down with the burden?"

"You're not dragging him down. You're only enough burden to make him stand straighter."

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"Like natives who carry packs on their heads? Oh, Jimmy, don't make me start laughing. . . . Do you think, really, that everything will turn out all right?"

"How can they stop Jack?" demanded Kildare. "Gillespie noticed him today. Gillespie was talking afterwards to me about him."

"Was he? Jimmy, was he?"

"Of course he was," lied Kildare. "Gillespie noticed him at once. Brains will tell. They can't stop Jack. It's only a question of getting a grip on a chance, a ghost of a chance."

"How I love you for saying that! . . . Mary, please don't go!"

"She has to. It's the hospital," said Kildare.

Davison came over and looked down.

"Look what he's done to her already, Mary," he said. "A blood transfusion. How do you do it without instruments, Jimmy?"

"*I* could tell you how," said Joan Davison.

"Go on, then," said Davison.

"By telling lovely white lies," said the girl, "and by loving people so much."

"He's a home wrecker, is that it?" asked Davison. "I'll see them to the elevator."

They said goodnight to Joan and went out into the hall. Mary Lamont walked briskly ahead toward the elevator. Kildare went slowly after her, beside Davison.

"THIS is a little thick, Jimmy," said Davison. "You come with dinner under your arm, and then you leave so there'll be more food left for us. You on your twenty a month! Don't do this again, young fellow. The next time, Joan will tumble to it. And we're not beggars yet—not quite."

"This is no gag," said Kildare. "We have to get back to the hospital. I got the call when I was going out."

"You mean it, really?" asked Davison, searching the face of Kildare, but the interne supported his lie with perfect sincerity of expression.

"Of course I mean it," he said. "I wouldn't risk anything like that. Joan's too clever. She sees through things."

"How does she look to you?" asked Davison, anxiously.

"She's better," Kildare lied again.

"You think so?"

"Definitely better," said Kildare.

"She's so depressed, Jimmy. Break your heart to see how she's always fighting off the blues and cheering up for my sake."

"She's a real one, all right," said Kildare. "By the way, Gillespie is talking about you. Maybe we can wangle something."

"Is he talking?" asked Davison, eagerly. "Listen, Jimmy, whoever helps me now, Jimmy—till I can see the child born and Joan well and strong . . . But a girl in that shape—you know, they live on hope and happiness more than on food. That's why you're so good for her. Come in often, will you?"

"Of course. What's specially hard on you just now, Jack?"

"Nothing. There's nothing specially wrong. Just things in general."

"There's something particularly bad. What is it? What are you breaking your heart about?"

"You relentless mind-reader! But there's nothing you could help about. No use telling you."

"There's always a use in telling it. It gets it partly off the chest. Tell me what's up."

"Something that only money can cure. I took her to see Doctor Langsley. You know him?"

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"He's one of the tops," agreed Kildare. "What did he say about Joan?"

"He says she needs a change of air. Plenty of red meat and a different climate. A month in Florida, for instance.

"A month in Florida," repeated Davison. "A week in heaven—a thousand dollars—it doesn't matter; one thing is as far away as the other. Jimmy, a woman's a fool if she marries a poor man. And there ought to be a law against doctors marrying."

"She doesn't need Florida. She needs a dash more hope; and we're going to find it for her," said Kildare.

HE WAS silent, afterward, as the elevator carried him and Mary clanking down to the street level. It was one of those old, hydraulic crates and it gave a prison voice of complaint and a prison atmosphere to the tenement.

When they were out on the street, Mary Lamont stopped to look up and down.

"Which way?" she asked.

"What makes you know it's not the hospital?" he asked.

"Because I'm beginning to know you quite well. At least, I know when you're lying."

"I've got a job for you, but it's not in the hospital."

"All right, whom do I have to mother now?"

"You're looking tops," said Kildare. "I like that red doowhickus in your hat."

"That's just in order to pretend that this is Christmas. Besides, you like red."

"I never said so."

"No, but you've looked it. You're always looking and saying things without words. What's the new job?"

"How tired are you?"

"I still can walk and talk."

"Take my arm."

"All right. You don't like this, usually."

"I like it tonight."

"Because you're feeling pretty far away from me?"

"Don't talk like that."

"Oh, but you're pretty distant. You wonder what you're doing walking along with this girl. Who is she? What does she mean?"

"Quit it, Mary."

"She's the same girl, all right. These are the same old shoes, the same old gloves, the same three-year-old coat."

He looked straight ahead, forgetting her.

"I want you to go see Marguerite Paston," he said.

"Ah, that sweet, sweet thing?"

"Yes. You were right about her. She's a charm. Here's her address."

"That's good. I'll be glad to see her. What's it all about?"

"I can't tell you the details."

"Honor-bound, and all that?"

"Yes."

"You are *such* an honorable fool, Jimmy darling."

"She's dangerously unhappy. That's all you really need to know."

"Dangerously?"

"Sometimes love is a dangerous nerve condition," said Kildare.

"I can almost *hate* you sometimes, Jimmy. Do you always have to be a doctor?"

"And if you'll remember Juliet, and Sarah Churchill, and Héloïse . . ."

"You mean, till-death-do-us-part, and all that?"

"THAT'S the idea. You're going to go and see this girl and talk to her. You've got to have a theme, but

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better than anything I can give you is what you'll find in her."

"Tell me what. Give me an idea."

"The point is that you'll have to find your own theme, out of her. She needs watching, Mary."

"I'll watch her, then. I knew that you'd want me to be a mother, again. She's dangerously unhappy?"

"She's sure that it's only a step from earth to heaven. You see?"

"I see. That's pretty bad, Jimmy."

"I think that I've got her on the right path—hopeful, and all that. But I'm not sure. You're the one who has to make sure for me."

"How do I lead off?

"She's a little in need of a tonic. I asked you to take one over to her. Buy some junk in a drugstore."

"Won't she see through that?"

"She doesn't see through crooked things. She understands all of the good and none of the evil."

"All right. And then what?"

"Then you tell her how much everybody loves her. How you love her and how I do."

"You? No, no, Jimmy. I don't want to exaggerate. You have compassion, but you don't love."

"Oh, don't I?"

"Not a whack. You're fuller of compassion than a loaf is full of dough and air-holes. But love is a different matter."

"If that's true, then I'm sorry," he said.

"In another minute," she said, "you'll take compassion on me, too. You'll cut yourself out of my life and my heart and give me a chance to get a better man. That's the way you'll take compassion, so I'd better shut up. . . .

"I don't know why I talk this way. It must be the Christmas that's in the air. It's gone to my head. . . .

"I don't mean to be satirical, Jimmy. I'm loving you all the while I'm sticking pins in you. But women are such idiotic creatures! . . . Why are you stopping here?"

"I want you to finish . . . And then this is the address of Marguerite."

"I'm to finish my tirade, first?"

He was silent.

"Well, you finish it for me, will you?" she asked. "There's not too much light, is there?"

He took her in his arms and kissed her.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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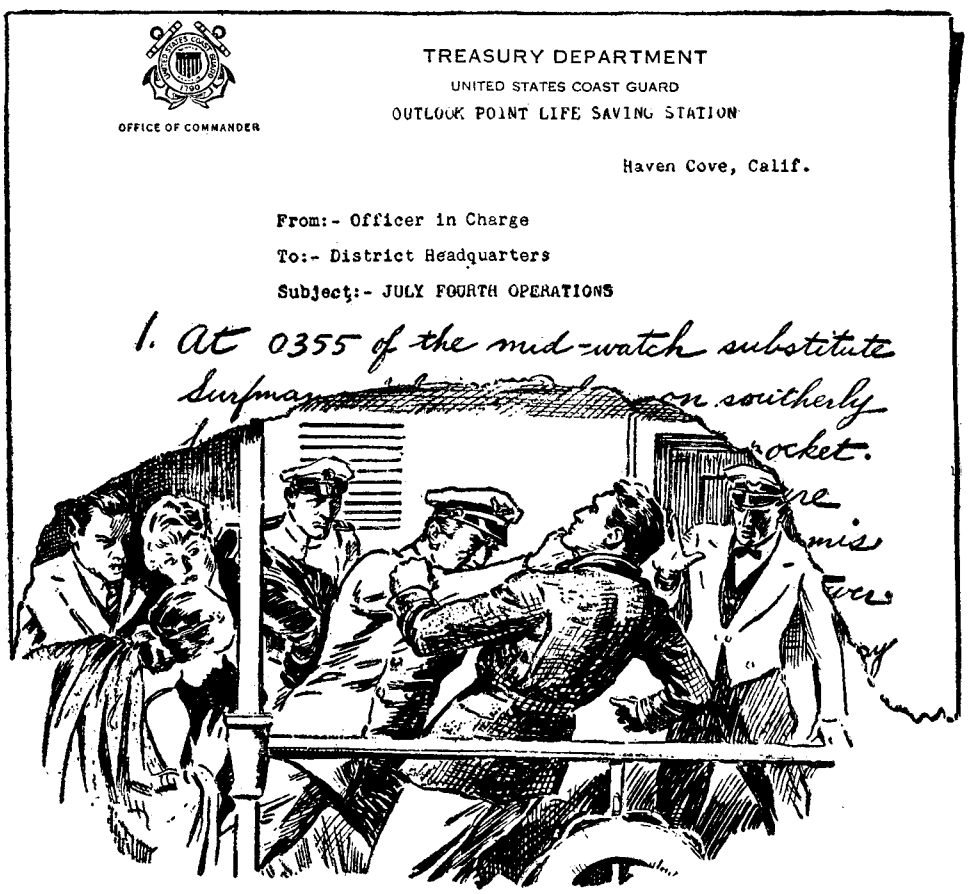
Dry Job

By CARL RATHJEN

Author of "S. S. Monotony," "Fairweather Skipper," etc.

Over the mountains without brakes, over a rock-strewn trail that's murder for horses and suicide for men—a fine way to rescue a ship at sea! Bradley's trouble was, he thought it could be done; and the epidemic of headaches resulting was colossal



I

BOSUN BRADLEY paced the office of the Outlook Point Life Saving Station and his shadow cast by the desk lamp raced back and forth on the wall like a caged animal.

He felt caged himself. Oh for a wild sea and a ship on the bar. Or even a day like yesterday, the fullest day he'd seen in his thirty-one years of service. A day that started wrong and kept going wrong, thanks to the insolence of a pup like Tony Drake and the meddling

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of State Senator Avery Bigelow Vetter.

Yes, give him another day like that, even with Senator Vetter. Anything but this monotonous work of writing up his reports.

He looked at his bruised knuckles, mementoes of the first thing that had gone wrong yesterday, then he sat down at the desk and looked at what he had written.

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
OUTLOOK POINT LIFE SAVING STATION
Haven Cove, Calif.

From: Officer in Charge
To: District Headquarters
Subject: JULY FOURTH OPERATIONS

1. At 03:55 of the mid-watch Substitute Surfman Johnny Dolan, on southerly beach patrol, spotted a distress rocket. His acknowledging Coston flare was seen by Surfman Joe Beemis on watch in the observation tower. Beemis notified the Communications Room and I was duly awakened and informed. I aroused the crew of the picket boat and put out through a mild sea. Three hundred yards beyond the entrance to the cove a submerged timber escaped detection in the darkness and stove in the forward starboard compartment of the boat. (For details of damage, see accompanying report). I continued on to the yacht which had sent up the rocket, and . . .

. . . and there the day really started to go wrong.

Not that it hadn't been wrong before that with the picket boat being stove in, but even earlier than that things hadn't been just right.

He'd been hove to from sleep most of the night because he'd known he'd overstepped himself by speaking out of turn on a certain matter that closely concerned State Senator Vetter, and he could expect trouble about it.

So he'd been waiting for storm warnings, and this damage to the picket boat and what he discovered when he approached the yacht were like advance warnings of a greater storm, like seas building up higher and higher on the beach before a real blow arrives.

So, a bit testy from sleeplessness over Senator Vetter and with the gurgle of water in the picket boat's stove-in compartment reminding him of the damage there, his temper became heavier when, upon approaching the yacht, he discovered that there appeared to be nothing amiss with her. Her ghostly white hull slipped smoothly through the predawn darkness to the accompanying purr of her Dielsels.

Now what goes on? he wondered angrily.

"Ahoy, the yacht," he called sharply. "Heave to."

The reply came from her awninged afterdeck, not the bridge, and its insolent tone added more cargo to his temper.

"Heave to? What for?"

"U. S. Coast Guard. Heave to!" he barked.

A megaphoned voice called from the starboard wing of the bridge to the afterdeck.

"We'll have to obey, Mr. Drake."

Below the awning a filler of sudden light was sandwiched between the hull of the yacht and the press of the dark sky. Bradley saw wicker chairs, and several women and men drawing apart suddenly.

Cocktail glasses glinted in the light and a young, dark-haired fellow, wearing white flannels, a checked coat, and a green muffler about his neck, came toward the rail.

"Tony Drake, the movie star," murmured Machinist's Mate Riley, standing beside Bradley at the wheel near the stern on the open deck of the picket boat.

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THE yacht heaved to and Bradley brought the picket boat alongside with more gurgling from the starboard bow. He'd have to answer to District Headquarters for that damage, but first there was going to be some answering done right here.

He clumped his boots onto the yacht's deck and marched toward the dark-haired sprig who stood with head lifted under the lights as if he knew that at that exact spot the lights detailed and shadowed the finely chiseled lines of his profile to best advantage.

"What's the idea?" Drake demanded.

"You sent up a distress rocket," Bradley charged.

"Distress rocket?" Drake stared haughtily at him, then smiled indulgently. "Oh, you didn't mistake our Fourth of July celebration for—"

He laughed, catching the light just right on his even glistening teeth, then he turned to the group behind him. "Hey, gang, did you hear that? The old man of the sea mistook our celebration for . . ."

The group laughed, and Bradley felt his temper settling toward the Plimsoll marks and dispatching more of the chill of the night.

"It ain't funny," he snapped. "You sent up a false alarm rocket and—"

The group only laughed more. A stocky man, the yacht captain, approached.

"Perhaps if you come to my cabin, Bosun," he suggested, "you and I can—"

"That's all right, Meyers," said Tony Drake. "You just keep the bus parked at the curb as the officer directed. I'll settle this.

"Now, officer," he said to Bradley while the group laughed again. "To save the trouble of going to night court, how much is the fine? I'll pay it to you right now, and you can climb back on your puddle-jumper, or ripple-jumper, and—"

"A fine don't mean much to your kind, does it?" retorted Bradley. "Well, I'll see that you won't get off as easy as—"

"Now see here," snapped Drake, putting on his Indignant Expression Number Three, "we were only celebrating the Fourth of July as any good citizen should, and if we can't do that without some officious underling of the United States military finding fault with it, then it's time that underling and his military organization were Congressionally investigated for subversive leanings and activities and—"

That was a mistake on Drake's part, mentioning political investigation, because it reminded Bradley of trouble he could expect any time soon from State Senator Vetter about a certain matter.

And the reminder, along with the impudent tone, shoved his temper below the Plimsoll marks.

He hit Tony Drake and somewhat altered the profile about the nose. He carried on from there and scared Tony Drake's guests as he ranged the deck and pulled cushions from the chairs and overturned the chairs, looking for fireworks to heave overboard.

He didn't find any and that made him madder. When Tony Drake threw a cushion at him he threatened to heave Drake overboard; but Drake retreated.

He turned and got the names and registry and other information he wanted from the captain who wigwagged the corners of his mouth each time Tony Drake, from the refuge of a companionway, pulled the handkerchief from his streaming nose long enough to yowl why didn't somebody do something to Bradley.

Bradley was a bit abashed by what

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he'd done. Headquarters wouldn't like it. But he didn't let on about that to Drake.

"You ain't heard the last of this," he declared, climbing down to his stove-in picket boat.

"Neither have you," Drake promised hotly, venturing out on deck and glaring down at him over his crimson handkerchief.

II

BRADLEY, slumping over his desk, glanced wearily ahead at the next section of his report. It didn't make him any happier.

2. At 05:15 I finished my examination of the damage to the picket boat and ordered my crew to their routine duties about the station.

Back ashore at the landing by the boathouse, on the cove below the living quarters, he examined the picket boat. It was pretty bad and was going to take a lot of explaining to District Headquarters.

By now his temper was water-logged and his control of it somewhat sluggish. He turned and lined his sights on Substitute Surfman Dolan, an awkward gangling lad who stood nervously among the men on the landing.

Dolan was another thing going wrong today that would require explanation to Headquarters.

"For three years," Bradley barked at him, "I been trying to make a good guardsman out of you, been trying to whistle a wind into that becalmed brain of yours. And all I get are untrustworthy sqalls like this Fourth of July rocket business and—"

Dolan gulped, and the long fingers of his splayed hands fidgeted. He sincerely hoped, sir, that his mistake would be no reflection on the skipper. He admitted his mind hadn't exactly been on his job when he was trudging the last leg of his beach patrol.

He'd been thinking that one week from today his three years' probation would be up and he'd been hoping that the skipper, sir, would surely recommend that he be sworn in as a regular enlisted member of the Service because he and Millie Donegan, who worked at the Drive In and Eat on 101, were waiting for that before they got spliced even though she'd have to keep on working because his pay wouldn't be enough for the two of them until he worked his way up into the warrant corps.

Anyway, when he'd yanked his thoughts back a week upon spotting the rocket he forgot to subtract a week from the date in his mind.

Otherwise he would have known that today was the Fourth of July and he might have waited a moment to make certain there actually was distress out on the Pacific before he yanked the tape to ignite the Coston flare to get the attention of Surfman Joe Beemis who was in the tower a mile and a half up the beach.

"Three years I been training you for this," snapped Bradley. "You got about as much initiative as a ship's wake. You tell that girl Millie she'd better try to increase her tips so she can support the two of you after this boner."

3. At 05:16 an airplane, which I made use of later in the day for official duty, brought State Senator Vetter who dropped in for a visit.

AFTER settling Dolan's hopes for the future, he confronted Surfman Beemis who hastily tried to cover himself by saying sure he'd known what day it was, but he had been gazing into the

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darkness toward the northwest and had not spotted the rocket himself.

He'd just taken it for granted there was trouble at sea when he had seen the red glow of Dolan's flare, so he had informed the Communications Room like he was supposed to do.

Bradley scowled at him, and the day promised to go wrong again.

Out of the fog creeping in off the dawning sea came an amphibian. It was not a Service ship. It squatted into the cove and came ploughing toward the landing, and State Senator Avery Bigelow Vetter started to climb out ponderously in last night's wilted soup and fish.

Bradley saw a falling barometer in Vetter's arrival at this hour of the morning.

The senator, who Bradley suspected had flown from an all-night political rally in Frisco just to get here after receiving certain disturbing news from his cohorts in this county, undoubtedly would demand to talk to him alone.

So Bradley, turning toward his crew and catching them smiling among themselves over the fiasco with the yacht, disciplined and got rid of them at the same time by assigning each man to some routine job he particularly disliked.

He ordered Beemis to varnish the deck of the observation tower, even though Beemis had always protested that varnish fumes gave him a headache. However, Beemis no doubt thought it best not to mention headache this time.

Dolan lingered wretchedly a moment, not having received any order from Bradley; then turned away despondently and drifted after the others like a rudderless ship.

Bradley, wondering why an honest man couldn't be conscientious about his job without getting snarled in a politician's red tape, calmed the storm in his eyes before he turned to face the flabby pink face of Senator Vetter, who was just groping onto the landing like a grunting sea lion.

"How are you, Senator?" he greeted, outwardly casual. "I was told I might expect you to drop in for a visit some time."

Vetter smiled benignly, and his voice was as soft as the creeping fog and his gray eyes as chilling.

"I hear you've been dabbling in politics, Bradley, without the knowledge or consent of your superiors," he said. "I thought I might give you a few pointers."

"Thanks. You know how to rig all the lines, I guess," remarked Bradley.

Vetter laughed somewhere deep behind his double chins.

"Yes, I know all the ropes. And how to pull them too," he added.

Bradley looked calmly at his calloused clean palm.

"I've done some of that myself," he said.

"I've heard you're pretty good at it too," suggested Vetter. "A real credit to the Service. You know, Bradley"—he smiled—"you and I are pretty much alike. We each know the ropes of our own particular branch of public service. There's nothing anyone can teach us about them, and as long as we remain on the job it's our duty to give the best that in us for that particular job.

"That's what's going to put this country on its feet again. Each man doing his *own* job the best he knows how, and letting the other fellow do his. Don't you agree?"

"WELL," replied Bradley, "I don't know as how I can do anything about putting the country on its feet.

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My job's always been to help men put their feet back on shore. And it's like you said, I know just how the lines of that should be rigged."

"Precisely," beamed Vetter.

"And it's because I know how the lines should be rigged," Bradley declared without lowering an eyelash, "that I'm re-rigging the ropes of your highway racket!"

"Meaning?" snapped Vetter.

"You know what I mean," said Bradley. "You're pulling ropes under cover to haul the proposed coastal highway fifteen miles inland so it will pass right through your virgin lumber holdings and you won't have the expense of building a private road so your lumber trucks can get in and out."

"Oh come now," Vetter demurred with a rigid smile. "Whose propaganda have you been listening to? That's the logical way for the highway to go, the most direct route for trucking from Washington and Oregon to San Francisco."

"Logical? Direct? Bilge-water!" scoffed Bradley. "What's the matter with 101 for business? Nothing. This new route is to be scenic, for tourists, like the one that was built from Monterey south'ard. And it's got to stay on the coast because—"

"For piffling tourist trade?"

"The chambers of commerce don't think it's piffling, but that ain't what I'm interested in. That highway's got to stay on the coast where it belongs so the Service can speed its equipment to where it's needed when it's needed."

"Nonsense," exploded Vetter, his double chins quivering. "The State and Federal Governments aren't going to put out funds for some remote possibility like that. You don't need the highway. If anything does happen, what have you got your cutters for? These shore stations are obsolete anyway, a waste of taxpayers' money."

"Obsolete, huh?" Bradley snapped. "I'd like to see you hard aground where nothing but a breeches buoy or a surfboat could take you off, *if* we got there in time. You'd make a different kind of political speech then."

Senator Vetter stared at him.

"You're still going to hang yourself in *my* ropes then?"

"I'm still going to talk to meetings and chambers of commerce and get up petitions till I get that highway where it belongs," declared Bradley. "And as for getting hung, the man who tries it better know how to tie a better knot than me."

"He probably can when it's his own rope," snapped Vetter. "All right, Henry," he said to the pilot of the amphibian, "get me back to Frisco. I want to make a few telephone calls—to Washington. Good day, Bradley."

"Good day, Senator. Hope your pilot knows his ropes for getting through the fog.

He saw Vetter arguing with the pilot who pointed at the fog and then at the mountains as the amphibian drifted away from the landing. He watched the plane finally taxi slowly toward town in the thickening fog, then he walked thoughtfully up the raked gravel path lined with whitewashed stones.

He looked at the pear-shaped boulders at the head of the path. He'd carried them down from the mountain and put them in place years ago when he'd been a substitute surfman.

III

IN HIS office he slowly kicked off his boots while he stared at the huge chart of the coastline hanging beside his desk.

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Southward from the station, the coast humped out to sea, and its extreme point, some forty miles below the station, was a good twenty miles farther out in the Pacific than the normal southerly sweep of the coast above and below the hump.

And that area was tattooed solidly—mountains, canyons, wilderness—with not a single unbroken line denoting even the most rudimentary road near the coast.

He pulled his gaze down from the chart to the telephone. Was there anyone he could phone and ask to stand back of him against Vetter's storm warnings? Had he convinced anyone sufficiently yet about the proper location for the highway?

He reached for the telephone, and the day went wrong again.

4. I made my preliminary verbal report to District Headquarters about the incident with the yacht.

The District Headquarters lieutenant, who was the district commandant's aide, crisply interrupted Bradley's carefully worded telephone report about the fiasco with the yacht.

"Never mind, Bosun. We've already been informed by Division Headquarters who were contacted via ship-to-shore telephone from the yacht. Just send in your written report, your version, and don't try to place the picket boat's damage on Drake. That was within your responsibility, false alarm or not."

"Aye, aye, sir. I'll send in my report," Bradley said uneasily. Things were sure happening fast, and wrong, this morning.

"You'll hear from me shortly when the Division Commandant arrives and is consulted," the lieutenant said tersely. "And it's my guess, from what I gathered about your high-handedness in striking that man, Washington will be dragged into this. You're not to leave the station during your off-duty. That is all for the moment."

There was a click in the receiver.

"Ain't it enough?" Bradley muttered. How could Washington stay out now with two towlines on it?

An hour felt its way through the fog as he waited for the phone to ring again. He paced back the years of his service before the wall covered with faded news photographs of wrecks whose crews he'd had a hand in saving.

A long record, thirty-one years to be exact. How much ballast would it carry for him? Ordinarily, with his clean record and the extenuating circumstances of the Drake affair taken into consideration, Headquarters might deem a reprimand sufficient punishment.

But with Washington dragged in, with bad publicity for the Service, any effort to hope for the best would be like wishing for clear weather with a falling barometer.

5. I stood by, as ordered by District Headquarters, to await further developments in the Drake matter.

HE STILL paced the office, and shortly after the bracing aroma of coffee drifted through the station, Chino, the cook, brought in a tray and didn't close the door tightly.

Bradley caught snatches of conversation from the off-watch members of the crew trooping along the hall to mess. Some grapevine of their own had tipped them off.

". . . . looks like the skipper's got himself snarled bad this time . . . don't mean a thing . . . yeah, leave it to the skipper, he'll cut his way out somehow . . . wanta bet on that, this time ain't like the others . . ."

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He sat down and stared at the tray. He was still sitting there, waiting, when Senator Vetter returned just before six bells, seven A.M. Now what?

The senator remarked that the fog still kept his plane down. He'd met Tony Drake in town. Drake had come ashore to have his nose examined by a doctor.

To the senator it appeared to be just an ordinary bloody nose. The real damage was done to Drake's feelings. He'd been humiliated before his friends.

The senator's tone was not gloating. It was too pleasant, sympathetic, like the calm before a dirty blow. Bradley remained stonily silent, watching for a change of wind in Vetter's casual talk.

The senator was sorry to hear that Drake was out for Bradley's blood. Drake had the influence for it too. It might possibly mean loss of rating, or more likely loss of job for Bradley.

The senator could fully understand what that would mean to Bradley when he still had sixteen years of service ahead of him if . . .

So that's the way the wind was blowing. Bradley looked briefly up at the chart. Vetter, sitting on the corner of the desk, looked down at him.

"Bradley," he said softly, "I'll make a deal with you. If you'll stop trying to snarl my highway ropes, I'll pull some others I have to hogtie Drake for you. You can't do that with *your* ropes."

Bradley stood up. He wondered whether matters could get any worse with Headquarters if he hit Vetter too.

"You're right," he snapped. "Maybe I can't hogtie Drake with my lines, because I don't let them drag in the muck."

It was as good as hitting Vetter. The senator got off the desk fast and stepped back, his face the color of an ignited Coston flare.

He argued. The Service didn't need the highway. Bradley was thinking in terms of the past. There hadn't been a ship on the rocks in years. Modern ships don't go astray or get blown ashore like sailing vessels. And if they do get into trouble, they have radio to summon cutters to take them in tow before they ever get near the rocks.

"You trying to tell me the ropes of my job?" flared Bradley.

"I don't *have* to pull my ropes for you," Vetter retorted. "I can stop you my original way, but I'm only offering to do you a favor in this Drake affair to save myself the trouble of—"

"Favor!" Bradley stormed. "For yourself you mean. What do you think some poor devils at sea will call it when there's no highway to— I've picked up the bodies of men who died because we couldn't get the breeches buoy to them soon enough. I—I'll be damned if I'll barter my conscience for sixteen more years!"

6. At 07:05 District Headquarters telephoned and informed me that I was to . . .

"YOU'RE just being stubborn, Bradley," snapped Vetter. "Don't be a fool. You're throwing away sixteen years, letting yourself possibly be dishonorably thrown out of the Service just because you're holding out for a highway you don't—"

"I ain't got my yellow ticket yet," retorted Bradley, "but even if I do get it, I know my conscience will be white."

"You're throwing away—"

"I'll be throwing you out of here if you don't—"

The telephone bell saved Vetter. In spite of himself, Bradley hesitated before going to the phone. Well, here it was. Probably the start of his yellow ticket.

"You'd better answer it," suggested Vetter. "Maybe you'll change your mind

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and listen to what I've been saying. I can stop Drake any time you say the word."

Bradley picked up the phone. "Bosun Bradley speaking," he said firmly.

It was District Headquarters all right. But the terse words of the lieutenant confused him until he quickly rerigged his mind to cope with the unexpected announcement.

"There's trouble down the coast from you, Bosun!"

He pressed a button on the desk and saw the senator's eyes widen then narrow as the alarm began to sound through the station.

He heard feet pounding overhead and on the stairs, his second in command, Bosun's Mate Williams, bawling from somewhere to the men to shake a leg. Williams came in the office to await orders.

Bradley glimpsed the men lining up in the hall. Dolan, with a longing expression, stood to one side like a drifting lighter awaiting a towline.

But all that was only a background to which Bradley paid no attention as he listened to the lieutenant and turned to face the chart.

The freighter *Dorchester,* Seattle to Frisco, had radioed she'd miscalculated her dead reckoning in the fog, and believing herself safely past the long hump of coastline had changed course too soon and driven full onto Chowchilla Bar. That would be thirty-odd miles below the station.

"Are they sure it's Chowchilla Bar they're on?" Bradley demanded.

The lieutenant said that was positive. The Coast Guard radio stations had taken bearings on her. The plan of operation was for a rescue from seaward.

Bradley scowled at the chart. A seaward rescue. This was playing right into Vetter's hands.

THE nearest cutter was ten hours away. His instructions were to start southward in his motor surfboat. That would be a couple hours' run, he decided. He was told he would be assisted later by the Gabriel Station's picket boat which was starting northward immediately on its eighty-mile run. He frowned at the chart.

"The tide's due to lift in a couple hours," he interrupted the lieutenant. "If the *Dorchester's* hooks ain't got a good hold, she may be shoved off the bar and into the rocks. That'll mean we can't do a thing from seaward."

Senator Vetter moved into his line of vision and glared at him. The lieutenant, who was unfamiliar with that particular sector of coast (he'd recently been shifted to this district from farther south), said beach equipment — the buoy, hawser, short whip, Lyle gun and shoulder guns—could be loaded aboard the surfboat and the Gabriel picket boat to cover such an eventuality.

"No, sir," Bradley contradicted, his face feeling warm under Vetter's intent glare. "There ain't a place for more'n ten miles to either side of Chowchilla where we could land, and then there wouldn't be any way to transport the equipment along the beach. Maybe I'd better start overland so—"

"See here, Bradley," snapped Vetter.

Bradley turned away and listened to the lieutenant who said that overland would take hours, most of the day.

"Yeah, because we ain't got a road," growled Bradley, "but—"

"The most feasible plan under the circumstances is from seaward," the lieutenant declared crisply. "You're wasting valuable time arguing."

"We'll lose a whole lot more time," persisted Bradley, "if I can't do the job from seaward and have to wait around for hours for the Gabriel boat to arrive

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so I can use her radio to tell you to start equipment overland."

Vetter stepped closer to him. "Bradley," he charged, "you're deliberately—"

Bradley stared at him. The lieutenant's voice was barking in the receiver, but Bradley looked out the window at the fog. It was beginning to be punctured by the sun. He looked at Vetter again whose face was lobsterish as his gaze stabbed accusingly.

"Lieutenant," Bradley interrupted. "Listen to me. I got an idea that may save the whole situation . . ."

7. Senator Vetter, who was present in my office when the news of the distressed Dorchester *came through, was more than willing to donate the use of his plane for sizing up the situation.*

IV

HE COULD see the yellowish backbone of the bar as the amphibian circled for a third time above the *Dorchester*. The ship had driven hard upon the bar and was nearly two-thirds over it.

Each sea bursting against her counter seemed as if it would shove her off and into the deep black shadow of the lofty palisades four hundred yards away.

The *Dorchester* canted toward her stem, a stout ship finally brought to her knees before the stern palisades, towering imperiously over her with a mailed skirt of shark-toothed pinnacles thrusting through the lacy outer garment of foam and white water.

"Well?" Senator Vetter demanded impatiently, and challengingly, from across the amphibian's cabin.

Bradley took another long last look. Nothing more must go wrong today. Vetter spoke up again.

"She's too far out for land rescue," he declared ominously.

"A Lyle gun shoots seven hundred yards," Bradley muttered.

"What if it does?" Vetter demanded. "A cutter—"

"Ain't any cutter near," Bradley declared, still looking out the window. "All right, pilot," he ordered. "Head back to the cove, and make it fast."

Vetter leaned toward him.

"There's no cutter near," he agreed sharply. "But your surfboat can get here in about two hours, can't it?"

Bradley nodded, silently, staring out the window.

"And," Vetter demanded, "it could get close enough to the bar from the ocean side to—"

"It could get close to the bar," said Bradley, "but—"

He turned to face Vetter, and it was like looking into an angry sea. He hesitated briefly, wondering whether he was right in his decision. He spoke with a challenge in his tone. "You trying to rig the ropes of my job for me, Senator?"

"What are you trying to do in my highway matter?" retorted Vetter. "See here, Bradley, you know as well as I do that ship is within reach of rescue from the sea, but if you deliberately recommend to Headquarters that you should go overland, I'll withdraw my offer on the Drake affair."

"I didn't take you up on it," Bradley declared uneasily.

"I'll do more than get out of Drake's way," exploded Vetter. "If you go overland, I'll work with Drake. I'll get his yacht. I'll put fishermen aboard and bring them down here and do that rescue the way it should be done!"

Bradley stared at him.

"I guess you would," he muttered.

"Where would that leave you?" Vetter asked.

"High and dry I guess, struggling

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through country where there ought to be a highway," Bradley murmured. He looked out the window. He was glad he hadn't eaten any breakfast. The way his stomach felt, it wouldn't do to have food snarled in that hard knot.

"Well?" Vetter demanded. "What are you going to do, Bradley?"

"I—I can always hide a yellow ticket," he declared slowly, "but not a yellow conscience."

8. District Headquarters accepted my recommendation that the Gabriel picket boat start northward while I went overland with the beach equipment. I left Donlevy, radio electrician, second class, in charge of the station.

"YOU can't compromise with me, Bradley," stormed Vetter as Bradley hung up the phone. "That Gabriel picket boat won't get there till sometime this afternoon. While you're wasting time overland, Drake and I will be giving you and the Coast Guard the biggest black eye there ever . . ."

He ran heavily out of the office. Bradley looked wearily up at the chart.

"One of us will get a black eye out of this," he muttered uneasily, then hurried outside to where the crew was waiting with the truck. He saw Dolan standing abjectedly to one side.

Dull anger rankled within him. If it hadn't been for Dolan's mistake, this mess with Drake and Vetter might not have developed.

"Well," Bradley snapped at Dolan, "you waiting for me to lift you aboard? I'll need every hand, even your bungling ones, till this dry job is over."

Dolan leaped eagerly for the rear of the truck. Bradley saw Vetter's amphibian scooting across the cove toward Tony Drake's yacht. If this job went wrong, nothing could stop a yellow ticket. . . .

9. My crew and I shoved off at 08:33 for Spruce Glen in the mountains, twenty miles inland from where the Dorchester *lay. We hit better than sixty on Highway 101, but we found the mountain road to Spruce Glen not exactly suited for the size of our truck.*

He leaned forward involuntarily as the truck barely crawled toward the heavens. The road was nothing but a slim shelf high on the sheer wall of the mountain. It elbowed around a massive jut of rock.

Machinist's Mate Riley twisted the wheel as far as it would go, then with a startled curse threw out the clutch and stood on the brake as the right front wheel started toward the edge of the drop.

"Can't make it," he told Bradley. "I'll have to back and fill."

Bradley nodded and glanced at the sun. Vetter would be about halfway to the *Dorchester* with Drake's yacht. Riley, spinning the wheel the opposite way, let the truck ease backward. There were startled cries from the rear.

"Hold it! *Hold it!*"

Bradley heard gravel sliding down the precipice. Riley yanked the handbrake and raced the engine before he let in the clutch.

They squeezed around the turn between the rock and the drop, labored upgrade another fifteen yards to another elbow.

Back and fill. Back and fill. The road explored every crevice in the face of the mountain. The starboard wheels tempted disaster at every turn.

He wanted to get off and walk. He wasn't afraid to die in the sea. It was a clean way to die; but this would be messy.

"Engine's way overheated," said Riley, "maybe I'd better stop and cool—"

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"No," Bradley snapped. It was bad enough just sitting here impotently; but while the truck kept inching up the mountain there was just enough sense of progress to save his hopes from becoming entirely becalmed.

THE top of the grade finally, and the silent vista of sentinel peaks and endless ridges, the blue maw of the cloudless sky, the road disappearing down into the deep green trough of a canyon, flooded a wave of futility over him.

Three hours since they'd left the station. Twenty-five miles of tortuous road still to be traveled. Vetter would have arrived at the *Dorchester* an hour ago.

"Bosun," Bradley barked to Bosun's Mate Williams. "Stand your trick at the helm."

Riley pulled at his wet shirt as he climbed down.

It was still back and fill downgrade. The engine cooled, but . . .

Bradley sniffed suddenly, then again and again. Now what? He called back into the truck.

"Who's been smoking back there? What's burning?"

"It's the brakes," said Williams beside him. "They ain't going to take much more of this."

Then, suddenly, ten minutes later:

"There they go! The brakes!"

"Jam her into the wall!" commanded Bradley.

The truck screeched against the rock, and ground to a stop finally, swaying. Someone in the rear was swearing. Williams looked at Bradley.

"Give me a wild sea any time to a dry job like this," he growled, wiping the sweat from his face with his sleeve. Bradley sat motionless. No brakes left, and on a road like this. Well, what else was going wrong today?

"All right," he snapped to Williams. "Backwater her and free her from the wall. Bottom of the grade's just ahead. Don't let her get rolling too much. One of you, back there," he called, "get the block handy to put behind the wheel when we have to back and fill on the upgrade."

Substitute Surfman Dolan jumped down eagerly.

"Look out for Fourth of July rockets," someone said to him.

10. Arrived at Spruce Glen, a camp for hunters, an hour and a half past noon, 13:30. Made immediate preparations for the march to sea.

He told Dolan, Williams, and Riley —they'd done all the work so far—they could go to one of the cabins for coffee.

"Five minutes, that's all," he warned them. "The rest of you turn to and unload the truck."

Dolan did not go for coffee. He lifted down a box of shot line Beemis had placed at the rear of the truck. Bradley glanced uneasily at the sun, and wondered if Vetter had been able to take off the crew of the *Dorchester*. He turned to a swarthy, unshaven man from one of the cabins.

"How many pack horses you got here? Do you know the trail to the coast?"

"Plenty hoss," said the man, staring at the truck. He looked at Bradley and shook his head. "Me know trail. She is devil. Me no go. Hoss no go."

"Get the horses, and find someone who *will* guide me," commanded Bradley.

"Me only guide, but me no go. Me no lak trail. She is devil."

"You'll be paid to guide us," snapped Bradley.

The man shook his head doggedly. Bradley looked at the sun and swore

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softly. Then he re-rigged his argument.

When the mountains were on fire and the man was trapped, didn't the Government send in rangers to try to save him? All right, these men with the truck were sort of rangers too, sea rangers, and there were men trapped on the sea by the coast.

He wondered if he were telling a lie, if Vetter . . .

"Rangers nice fellow. Me guide then," the man said reluctantly. "But no hoss. Trail she bad. She break hoss leg."

"Get the horses," Bradley said wearily. "We can't stow all that gear on our backs."

11. With fast work all the gear—except the life car, the crotch and sand anchor—was stowed on the horses and after a hasty mess, at five bells of the afternoon watch we shoved off for the coast. The mountain trail required careful navigation, and in one spot we had to chart the course for the pilot!

V

THE progress was maddeningly slow. You saw a mountain looming ahead like a sea towering over you. But it didn't come rushing at you and under you and past you like a sea. You had to labor toward it and over it.

Each ripple in the landscape had to be climbed by inches. And that sun was rocketing across the sky. By now, if Vetter had failed to remove the freighter's crew, the Gabriel Station's picket boat would be arriving on the scene.

"Keep under weigh!" Bradley barked as the guide stopped ahead of him and the horse behind him blew its wheezing breath against his shoulder.

"You see now?" shrugged the guide, pointing ahead to the bed of the canyon to which they had just descended. Bradley looked, and his heart dropped like an anchor when he saw the boulders strewn and heaped in wild confusion. Somewhere under them a brook gurgled hollowly, echoing his last hopes draining out of him.

"Lak I tell you," said the guide. "No can take hoss. She break hoss leg."

"You've been in here before," snapped Bradley. "How'd you get through other times? What about that fork in the trail I saw a few miles back?"

"She go to bridge."

Bradley looked sharply at him and the man spoke quickly.

"Bridge she gone. Storm tree months back."

Dolan, carrying a pickaxe, walked by and pried a boulder to one side. He moved on to another.

"You're an optimist," growled Beemis, leaning wearily against a horse's sweating rump.

"Suppose you get out of that horse's lee and get a pick yourself," said Bradley. He looked at Dolan, then turned away thoughtfully.

He couldn't stand by and direct. He had to be doing more so he wouldn't have time to think ahead. He worked with the men, clearing a narrow trail.

And where the boulders were too big to be moved and there was no way around they moved in other boulders and shoveled gravel to make a footing of sorts for the horses.

Bradley heard one of the men mutter to another.

"If the skipper's wrong on making this a beach job and he gets booted out, this road-building ought to help him get a berth with the W.P.A."

They finally got the last trembling, whinnying, scrambling horse across. Its head drooped and its wet flanks heaved.

"Knock off. Ten minutes rest," gasped Bradley, staring at the steep trail

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ahead. The men sprawled on the ground. He sat on a fallen tree. He gazed up at the summit of the mountain.

The guide had said the *Dorchester* lay on the other side. Two miles by crow flight, five by trail. The sea seemed far away. Vetter and the Gabriel picket boat had been on the scene for hours.

Bradley's wet shirt felt clammy with a sudden chill in the air. He shivered slightly. The chill came from the tide of evening shadow flooding past him up the canyon. He rose stiffly.

"Turn to," he barked to the men. "Shove off," he told the guide.

"No," the guide protested. "We fall off trail in dark and die. We wait dawn."

"Shove off," Bradley repeated.

The trail twisted, zigzagged up the steep wall of the canyon. He tried not to watch the elusive summit. His wet shirt clamped like sheathing of ice about his chest in the evening breeze. His legs were wooden, with splinters of pain for each lifting, pushing step.

The steaming horses grunted and wheezed and balked. The panting, cursing men lashed them ahead with rope ends, then grasped the tails to drag along. A hawk, sailing effortless, mocked them with its raucous cry.

Night was submerging the mountains in darkness when Bradley shoved past the guide and clambered gaspingly up the last few feet of the tortuous trail.

He ran drunkenly through the dark woods. He burst through meshing bushes and saw the black marble of the sea flecked with whitecaps, the riding lights of a ship, the cutter *Itasca,* rolling at anchor, but no sign of the Gabriel picket boat or Tony Drake's yacht.

Did that mean they had come and gone, taking the *Dorchester's* crew with them? Was the cutter standing by to tell him that he was too late? That he had been wrong?

He groped nearer the edge of the palisades and peered downward. . . .

12. Arrived on the scene an hour after sunset, about one bell of the first watch, and found that my anticipations had been correct—the Dorchester's *hooks had not been able to hold her on the bar when the tide rose. She lay locked in the teeth of the rocks about 250 yards offshore. But I also found a new factor that complicated what would have ordinarily been a simple rescue outside of the difficulties of arriving on the scene. The cutter called my attention to . . .*

WHILE waiting for his crew to arrive with the pack horses, he pointed his flashlight at the *Itasca* to signal his arrival. A light on her mast winked a reply.

Standing by. Begin rescue operations whenever you are ready. Dorchester *in no immediate danger of breaking up. Suggest you give first attention to yacht.*

He started. The yacht? He squinted down into the darkness. Had Tony Drake and Senator Vetter been so rash in their efforts to effect a rescue before his arrival that they had blundered onto the rocks?

A stream of light poured from one of the *Itasca's* searchlights and splashed over the shattered crystal whiteness of Tony Drake's yacht a quarter-mile south of the *Dorchester.*

He swore as only a weary man can swear when more burdens are heaped upon him. He wasn't mad at Drake or Vetter; he'd spent too many years saving seamen from their mistakes to be angry about this one.

He swore because he knew that his crew was in no condition to tackle *two* jobs.

13. My crew was exhausted from the difficult course of the mountain trail, but

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they turned to under the willing and energetic example set for them by Substitute Surfman Johnny Dolan, whom I fully recommend to be sworn in as a regular enlisted member of the Service. By midnight, by the light of fires we had removed all persons from the Drake yacht. I had the hawser cutter hauled out and the hawser drawn ashore to begin immediate rescue operations for the Dorchester *which was beginning to break up. My crew was on the verge of collapse and . . .*

They were heaving raggedly on the line to tighten the weary sag of the hawser now stretching out to the *Dorchester* when Riley's grip failed him. He crashed into Beemis who fell against Bradley. Five of them went down.

Bradley's legs felt buttery with weariness as he groped to his feet. He saw Riley's arms melt under him as he tried to push himself up. Beemis rolled to his back and lay open-mouthed, gasping in gulps of the cold night air.

"Knock off," Bradley said softly. He looked at the small crew from the yacht who had been assisting. They were tuckered from their efforts to keep the yacht from foundering before rescue arrived.

He stumbled through the darkness toward a fire where Vetter and Drake and the guests sat huddled. "I'll need you men to lend a hand on the lines," he said curtly, his eyes briefly meeting Senator Vetter's glare.

There wasn't room enough on top of the palisades to use a horse to haul the buoy in from the *Dorchester,* and by three A.M. when only a third of the freighter's crew were removed the hands of Drake and his guests were red and raw to the quick.

Senator Vetter's face was glowering in the light from the fires, and any moment Bradley expected trouble from him.

There was a shout in the night, and Bradley saw men from the Gabriel Life-Saving Station arriving to reinforce his crew.

Shortly after sunrise the *Dorchester's* captain, with the ship's cat tucked inside his coat, was hauled ashore.

"I know something of this country," he said a little later, to Bradley. "I don't know how the devil you got all that equipment overland. There ought to be a road through here."

Bradley saw Senator Vetter flush and turn to Tony Drake.

"How's that nose, Tony?" Vetter asked, then looked back at Bradley with challenge in his eyes.

So the wind was still blowing that way, Bradley thought uneasily. He'd licked Vetter on the highway matter, and the senator knew it, but was going to strike back through Tony Drake.

BRADLEY looked up from his report. How the devil was he going to finish this up? Trouble still had him in tow toward a yellow ticket, for when he had phoned his preliminary report to District Headquarters the lieutenant had informed him that Division Commandant had asked certain questions about the incident abroad Drake's yacht and about unofficial spokesmanship on a certain matter pertaining to highways.

Bradley paced the office and his shadow raced back and forth on the wall like a caged animal. He felt caged himself.

If he admitted striking Tony Drake, it would be in the records and the Commandant might have to take action.

If he denied it, that would be equally bad after Tony Drake's ship-to-shore phone call yesterday morning to Division Headquarters. It was the same way if he admitted or denied speaking unofficially on the highway bill.

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If he could only steer a middle course between actual confession or outright denial, he would not be charting a course of action for the Commandant. The Commandant would have to decide that himself. But this business of carefully rigging words together so they wouldn't foul on him . . .

He paused in his pacing. Maybe the job had been partly done for him by someone who knew how to rig words.

He spread open a late evening paper and read a paragraph near the end of a reporter's account of the rescues.

> . . . Boatswain Bradley, who directed the rescue work, was high in his praise of Tony Drake, who, during the entire hour he posed for photographers and newsreel men to show them how he had assisted Bradley in the rescue of the *Dorchester's* crew, vigorously denied that he had contemplated bringing suit against the Coast Guard as a result of an incident said to have occurred early yesterday morning when a Coast Guard officer allegedly boarded his yacht. He stated his nose had been injured when he fell aboard his yacht . . .

Bradley cut out that paragraph and pasted it in his report in answer to the Commandant's questions about the Drake matter. There was his middle course there; but on the other question he would have to rig his own words.

Or would he? He wrote slowly.

The Division Commandant inquired about unofficial spokesmanship. My view on that can be stated in the advice that State Senator Vetter once gave me. In substance, the senator declared that a man only invited trouble if he tries to touch the ropes of a job that is not his own, so it is better to let the other man snarl himself in your *ropes. The senator is widely experienced, and he should know.*

(signed) Z. B. Bradley

For two days the crew tiptoed about the station and kept out of his way while he awaited his reply.

He'd admitted nothing, denied nothing; but the commandant was a shrewd man who could read between the lines; and not liking what he read, he might blow a gale resulting in loss of rating, or a yellow ticket.

The reply finally came. Bradley stared at it. It was from Division Headquarters, and it was signed by the commandant himself, not by some underling.

And that could mean only one thing. The Commandant *had* read between the lines, and his entire course of action—about Tony Drake, Senator Vetter, and unofficial spokesmanship—was charted in his terse reply.

Bradley stared at it and smiled slowly. The commandant's reply read:

"Well done, Bosun."

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (Adv.)

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Some seedy-looking beachcomber would drop in, looking not at Pareda or Lamson, but at the bottle

By
GEORGE MASSELMAN
Author of "Windward Head," "Dutch Courage," etc.

The Bosun Is a Bandit

Wireless is as wireless does. An Argentine dungeon or a berth on the beach—all the same to ship's operator Lamson, when he discovers a small fortune in paint

MR. LAMSON in his cabin had noticed that the winches, one by one, had stopped whirring. Then there had come the noise of hatches being thrown into their grooves; and after that the confusion of steps passing his door, stevedores joining their lighters and sailors hurrying to the fo'c'sle for a few hours of much needed rest.

Now there was silence, the complete inertia of an anchored ship at night.

Deliberately he took off his earphones and placed them on the desk. His mind was not on wireless at the moment, but rather on the town which

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now was a mere few watches up the River Plate; streets with old remembered grogshops and the dives with bare tables which brought back the faces of friends he had made there.

He thought of little Pareda, "the shipsa news report" as he used to call himself, and he smiled.

Tomorrow he'd be there, in Buenos Aires, and he counted on it to give him a surcease from the boredom which so far had characterized this trip on the *Zaneleigh.*

She was an old ship, perhaps the oldest of the line; and as far as he had been able to make out, she had been tramping for the past few years.

But now they had put her on a quick run to the Argentine, giving her mail and even a shipment of gold, locked in the strongroom on the bridge. That strongroom was a relic from earlier days in the immigrant trade, when it had been used as a place of safekeeping for money and trinkets belonging to the passengers whose camplike existence between decks had offered no security for such things.

But it was not the ship as such that Mr. Lamson objected to, not her lines, nor the food or the quarters; it was the people who were on it. A ship was no better than the men you had to be with day after day. If that did not jell then everything else was lousy too.

The trouble was you could never tell what kind of a ship you were on until you were out at sea.

Of those with whom Mr. Lamson ate in the messroom, the second mate had proved the most communicative. It was not that he did a lot of talking, but at least he dropped in on him at times and spent a minute or two. One day Mr. Lamson had asked him point blank, "Why all this surliness, Martin?"

"Whose? Mine?" the second mate had asked. Mr. Lamson had brushed his slender fingers through the air.

"No, not yours. I mean the ship, the whole bunch of 'em. Just watch them in the messroom. Everyone is afraid to say a kind word about anyone else."

"It's the ship," the mate had said with some show of disgust. "In the line it's known as the *Siberia.* It's the way the office has of putting a man on probation."

"On probation? For what?"

"Some sailor may be tough to handle, or he may be suspected of smuggling. If they can't pin it on him, off he goes to the *Zaneleigh.* Naturally, we always have the worst kind of crew; and because of it, something always seems to happen—like dope, or stowaways, or anything else that gives a ship a bad name. It puts us all on our guard because we, with the stripes, naturally get it in the neck all the time."

The mate felt sure that the office had it in for him, to put him on the *Zaneleigh,* and that it would be a long time if ever before he could count on being promoted to chief mate. That was the rank he needed, he said, before he'd dare to get married.

"Marriage is no game for a seafaring man," Mr. Lamson had offered. "Do you feel you have to go to sea for the rest of your life?"

"It's a good job, isn't it?"

"Yes, but there are other things a man can do." A faraway look grew in the old wireless man's eyes, "You are too young to ignore a home life for the sake of the sweep of the horizon, the racing clouds . . .

"Did you ever think of trying your luck down in South America? It gives a fellow a better break than most any other place I know of. There's ranching, sheep farming, and—"

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"What?" The mate cut him short. "In that spig country? I should say not." The mate had left him on that note and had never referred to it again.

THE rest of the trip had continued in a drawn-out monotony which Mr. Lamson spent by looking forward to his conversations with other ships, clicking the words through the ether.

For the *Zaneleigh* there had been few messages. In reality there had been only one, rather cryptic at that. It had come in after they had left Pernambuco.

Ever so often Mr. Lamson had taken the copy out of his file and had looked at it, as if another reading might give him some clue: *Keep strict surveillance stop imperative keep crew on board.*

It had all the earmarks of being an answer to a question, but he had no record of having sent a wireless to the office. He had brought it to the captain, trying to watch his face while he read it. But the other had taken the message to the porthole, turning his back to Mr. Lamson.

"Any answer to that message?" Mr. Lamson said. The captain had pulled up a mouth corner; it was trying to be a smile or perhaps a smirk.

"No," he had snapped back, "there is no answer."

At first Mr. Lamson thought that the surveillance had to do with the gold. But that would have been a silly order because it was logical that a shipment of gold would get the necessary supervision. It was too heavy to be carried off without someone's noticing it, being in little cases, each containing ten thousand five-dollar gold pieces.

He was completely at a loss to understand the rest of the message. The implication was that the office did not want any desertions; but that was also too obvious.

In the end he had given up trying to decipher the message; and it was not until after Rio, where again the captain had been the only one to go ashore, that it dawned on him that the old man must have sent a cable to New York from the telegraph office in Pernambuco instead of using the ship's wireless. This alone could account for receiving a reply to a message he had never handled.

So they did not trust him! It had made him mad. Aside from his being under oath, captains had never yet doubted his integrity.

IT WAS cozy in his cabin with the hissing steam from the radiators and the red curtains screening the portholes. After all, he should not complain, he reasoned; he had the ether and his books, and between the two there was little time to worry about the ship. Whatever it was, it wasn't his affair.

Curling up in his bunk he heard a blast of a whistle and he knew that a tug boat was coming for the lighters. He figured the ship'd be leaving around midnight so as to get to Buenos Aires by daybreak.

He was almost asleep when he had the sudden suspicion that in Buenos Aires they might also stay on the roads Whatever reason there was for keeping the crew on board, the captain would hardly dare take the chance of putting them within an arm's length of the dock. There a jump and a short sprint would bring a man to that maze of little alleys which offered a safe hiding place to anyone who had a reason for wishing to get away.

Was he, too, included in that order? It made no sense, but the thought was pressing enough to make him jump up and look for that message again in order to dispel his misgivings.

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The cabin he slept in connected with the wireless shack by a door. In his pajamas he dashed through and opened the drawer which contained the file. He took out the whole sheaf, several hundred.

When he found it, he ruefully decided that the instructions referring to the "crew" might easily include him too.

Drumming his fingers on his desk, he chanced to see something on the carpet, just inside the door. Slowly and with a strange foreboding he picked it up. It was an envelope with his name on it and in a corner the simple request, *Please do not open until after leaving Montevideo.*

Several times he turned it over. There was no way of telling whom the letter was from.

He looked at the clock. In an hour they'd leave. He could wait that long. He put the letter into a drawer and sat down, listening intently for any sign of life which would indicate the impending up-anchor.

He felt the need for a cup of coffee; and slipping on an overcoat over his pajamas, he stepped into the alley and across it into the pantry. Wilke, the steward, was there pouring several cups.

"Good morning, sir," he greeted the wireless operator in his almost too polite manner.

"A bit early for morning, isn't it?"

"I know, sir, but it is after midnight. Cup of coffee, sir?"

"That's what I came for," Mr. Lamson said, taking the cup the other handed him. He wondered what a steward was doing up at this hour; they usually weren't that ambitious. The other noticed his questioning glance.

"I'm all excited about getting ashore, sir," he said. "Three weeks is a long time to be cooped up on a ship. I couldn't sleep a wink, so I said to myself, 'You better get up, Wilke, and see if you can't make yourself useful.'"

"A smart idea," Mr. Lamson said, slowly sipping the steaming brew. It was very hot and he decided to take it to his cabin. Also, he had heard the sound of the telegraph from the bridge, signaling the engineroom to stand by. "So long," he said balancing the cup in his hand.

"Yes, sir," the steward said, placing his cups on a tray and leaving for the bridge.

AT THE first sign of vibration in the deck, Mr. Lamson quickly slipped a finger under the flap of the envelope and tore it open. News was what he wanted, no matter how it reached him.

He was aware of the same feeling of anticipation as when he picked up his call letters from a faraway ship.

Aside from a single piece of paper which began, *Dear Sparks,* there was another envelope carefully sealed and addressed.

Dear Sparks: I took your hint. You were right. I am not cut out for being a sailor. I want more out of life than spending my time away from home, bickering with a lot of fools who are either envious or contemptuous of your rank.

I am forcing the issue and am jumping the ship; doing it right now, here in South America, just like you said.

You are the only person on board I can trust and I am asking you to deliver the enclosed letter in person when you get back to New York. Assure her that we won't be separated for long.

Thanks, old pal.

J. Martin

Thoughtfully Mr. Lamson folded the letter and returned it to the envelope together with the one for the mate's girl, slipping it into the pocket of his overcoat.

He was smiling quietly, but at the

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same time his face had become a little sad. The smile was for what Martin had done; the man had guts. Jumping ship was not exactly a nice thing to do, but it was better than waiting.

It was for his own sake that the old wireless operator felt sad. Once he had thought of doing the same thing. He no longer remembered why he hadn't; it had been a long time ago.

There was a loud banging on his door and the chief mate stuck his head inside. He was surlier than ever.

"The old man wants to see you, Sparks," he said.

"What? Me? At this time of night?"

"What has the time of night got to do with it?" the other snapped back. "He wants to see you. Martin has jumped the ship."

He did not wait for an answer but slammed the door and the wireless operator heard his footsteps hurry down the deck. Quickly Lamson put on his uniform, wondering how they knew Martin had jumped.

"You wanted to see me?" The captain stood wide-legged in his cabin.

"What do you know about the second mate?" he exploded.

"Nothing," Mr. Lamson said, raising his eyebrows, "except that the mate tells me he's jumped the ship." He felt he had no right to tell about the letter.

"You bet he has. He stole a case of gold."

"What?" Mr. Lamson doubted his ears.

"You heard me." The captain was fairly screaming now, scaring the steward out of his wits as he entered with some more coffee. "Fifty thousand dollars in gold! . . . Get out of here!" he shouted at the unsuspecting Wilke, wanting to vent his wrath on someone.

"How do you know he did?" Mr. Lamson asked incredulously.

The captain sneered at him.

"How? He was in charge of the strongroom, wasn't he? Suppose we didn't look there after he had disappeared? A whole case is gone."

"Holy Moses!" It was all Mr. Lamson could say. He still couldn't believe this.

"Well, I just wanted to find out if you'd seen him leave," the captain said. "That's all."

. . . On deck, he joined the first mate and some of the engineers at the railing.

"That guy sure had a nerve," one of the engineers said, spitting over the side, "jumping with fifty grand."

"Isn't that a lot for one man to carry?" Mr. Lamson remarked. "It's a hundred pounds."

"What of it? All he had to do was to throw it on the lighter."

Mr. Lamson had to admit that it all dovetailed beautifully. The mate might well be guilty, and he certainly was not there to defend himself.

From astern a cluster of lights was rapidly overtaking them.

"The *Mihanovitch* packet," the mate volunteered, while they looked at her. "She leaves Monte at two and beats us into B.A."

No one voiced the opinion that Martin might be on her; and Mr. Lamson, who had this sudden thought, said nothing about it. If the second mate was as shrewd as he was accused of being, it would be no more than natural that he should be making for Buenos Aires, where a man could buy himself all the freedom he wanted with very little effort.

As the packet pulled abreast, he was asking himself why he did not suggest that Martin might be on board. It would be a simple matter to wireless ahead to Buenos Aires and have the police meet her at the dock.

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But suppose the second mate was not guilty? Mr. Lamson quickly took his leave, afraid that the others might be reading his thoughts and so tie a noose around Martin's neck.

BY NEXT morning, he found that they were at anchor outside the Boca, the yellow water lapping against the sides of the *Zaneleigh* like a cat sniffing at a new arrival.

The news soon spread that the ship was going to stay on the roads. Lamson bit his lips when he realized that this might mean that he would not so much as get a whiff of the city he had been longing to revisit.

In the messroom, as everywhere else on board, there was a little talk of anything but the second mate's getting away with the gold. The captain gave strict orders that no one was to leave the vessel without his consent, news which caused a deep gloom to settle over the ship.

Shortly after breakfast, the agent came alongside and there was a confab in the old man's cabin. Then a tug arrived to take off the gold and the mail.

By then everything was in readiness to get rid of the cargo; lighters, high out of water like balloons, were towed out of the harbor and made fast to the *Zaneleigh,* while stevedores scrambled on board and booms swung into position. Almost at once the winches rattled all over the ship, tearing the cargo out of all four holds at once.

Aimlessly Lamson stood around, and at last returned to his cabin wondering what he might do in order to get through the day.

A smear of rust down the bulkhead and the recollection of a sailor walking down the deck with a can of paint made him decide to paint his cabin. Even if he did not care much how it looked, it would at least give him something to do other than staring at the skyline of Buenos Aires.

He hunted up the chief mate and asked him for some paint.

"Go and see the boatswain," the mate said. "He's in charge of the paint."

"Do you need much?" the boatswain asked, seemingly not anxious to part with any. Lamson explained what he wanted it for. "Go aft, in the poop," the boatswain finally said. "You'll find some old paint-buckets there, stuff we're ready to throw out."

Lamson said, "That'll be all dried out."

"It's all I can spare," the boatswain said gruffly. "Take the hard stuff off and you'll find plenty that can still be used."

Lamson was aware that a boatswain was entitled to his little graft by selling such odds and ends as paint and things to the jukboat which sooner or later would come rowing alongside, preferably after nightfall when a better deal could be made because then a good can of paint might inadvertently be included in the lot.

Going aft he entered the poop deckhouse where a dozen or so buckets of old paint stood around on the iron deck. The light came through a number of large portholes. A heap of rope, short lengths of chain, and similar discarded items cluttered up the deckhouse, waiting to be shoveled into a junkboat below the poop, as soon as a deal had been made.

Stepping over the debris, he made his way toward the paint cans, most of them five-gallon buckets. He picked up a stick of wood and poked in the cans.

In most cases he had trouble getting through the hardened layer of dried-out paint; and it was something of a

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surprise when he came to a can where his stick, instead of piercing the coating, pulled it away from the edges, showing a fair quantity of white paint.

Lamson at once suspected the boatswain of covering good paint with a layer he had cut out of some other can to make it appear dried-out like the rest.

The pail was too large to take to his cabin and he decided to pour some of the paint into a smaller one. But try as he might, he could barely lift the large pail off the deck, let alone tip it.

Puzzled by the extraordinary weight, he prodded into the paint and found that toward the bottom it was not as liquid as he had thought. In fact, he could not even stir it.

Pulling out the stick he saw that it had a thick blob of rubbery paint at the end of it and he swore to himself at having been fooled. Scraping the stick against the edge of the pail he noticed to his surprise how a small, flat disc worked itself loose. At once he reached for it.

Underneath the paint the disc was yellow.

QUICKLY he looked around. His fingers were holding a five-dollar gold piece. He was all alone. From a distance, he heard the muffled noise from the decks.

His mind, accustomed to instantaneous dots and dashes, reconstructed the theory of the theft. Martin could not have done it. If he had stolen the gold, he would have taken it along with him on the lighter.

Lamson wasted no time in trying to fathom the how and when, but he was sure of one thing: the man who had stolen the gold would waste no time in getting his loot ashore.

The thought of telling the captain was discarded almost as soon as it came. It would not clear Martin; neither would it help to discover who had done the job.

It struck Lamson that there were two things he had to do: put the gold beyond the reach of the thief; and get in touch with Martin, tell him what was hanging over his head.

But the gold had to be hidden first, and at once. Beyond getting a little paint for himself, he had no business in the deckhouse; and it was obvious that keen eyes were keeping close watch over the hiding place.

He closed the inner door of the deckhouse. All he needed was five minutes; and he prayed that those swinging hoists of cargo would act as a barrier for that length of time, delaying any prowling member of the crew.

Quickly he opened a porthole, one that was directly aft. He measured its opening with the size of the can and saw that it would fit.

Picking up a long board he laid one end of it in the porthole, slanting upward from the deck. He found a long rope and pulled one end of it through the handle of the pail. It took all his strength to lift the pail on the board; and he pushed it as high up as he could manage.

Deftly he took hold of the lower end of the board, using it as a lever while at the same time holding on to the double strands of rope that went through the handle.

As soon as the board was a little more than horizontal, the heavy pail slid slowly toward the porthole. With the board he kept it under control.

Suddenly he realized that the pail would not go through while straight up; he had measured only the diameter. Sweat grew on his forehead and his hands began to shake from the nervous

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strain. There was only one way out and that was to tip the pail while at the same time lifting the board high so that it would act as a skid.

He accomplished all this in one and the same instant by putting his shoulder under the board, straightening himself, and tipping the can toward him by pulling with all his might at the rope.

The moment it went he let the board look after itself and brought his hands down so that the friction of the rope against the edge of the porthole would keep the pail from plunging too rapidly.

The board glanced off his shoulder and the tension on the rope was suddenly increased. Quickly he paid it out. Down and down it went. He felt it enter the water without hearing it and kept paying out until the weight was taken off the rope.

As soon as the pail reached bottom he let go one end of the rope and pulled it up. He closed the porthole and quickly tucked the rope underneath the other junk. Some paint and water he wiped off with a rag.

He finished up the job by weighting down another pail with some odd bits of chain, so that outwardly and by the feel of it, at least, things were as they had been.

SHAKING in all his limbs he took stock of himself. His hands were grimy and the board had made a streak on his shoulder. He dusted himself off and wiped his face with a handkerchief before venturing out on deck.

He ran into the boatswain amidships, just when he was about to enter his cabin.

"Look at me," he said with some heat, "and not a thing to show for it."

The boatswain laughed and offered to see what he could do about it.

"Forget it," Mr. Lamson said. "I've lost all interest. If I can't go ashore I'd just as soon sleep."

But the thought of sleeping could hardly have been further from his mind. Going into his cabin he sprawled into his chair. He had locked the door against any intrusion upon his thoughts, and also because it made him feel safer —for the moment at least.

Whoever had had the nerve to steal fifty thousand dollars would hardly stop at anything else if it came to dealing with the person who was out to queer his game.

There could be little doubt that the thief knew what he was doing; those old cans of paint were not only the best hiding place but they also provided an ideal way of getting the loot off the ship.

Obviously the boatswain was beyond suspicion or he would not have allowed him to rummage through that paint at will. Lamson smiled a bit wryly when he realized that this still left some forty other members of the crew to be considered.

He aimlessly played with the dials and gave his key a few deft flips, just from habit. He realized that what he was doing was for Martin; the second mate would have to be cleared of this crime or he'd spend the next ten years in jail.

He could think of no worse job than going to that girl with Martin's letter and telling her that her man was in the hoosegow.

The junkboat was the logical starting point. If he could watch it come alongside and see who did the talking, then that might give him an inkling who the thief was. But—

He flicked his fingers. A man who had such a message to convey would not talk where he could be observed. And why should he talk at all? He

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would sneak off on that junkboat in the darkness.

The only way was to be on the shore when the junkboat pulled in. At that particular moment the thief was bound to be near his haul.

All of this meant that he, too, had to be ashore; soon at that. The captain was the only one who could give him permission to leave the ship and Lamson figured that it would have to be a good reason before he'd do so.

The key under his fingers gave him the idea. In quick succession he burned out some of the delicate coils. It could have happened by accident.

THE captain came into the messroom while most of the men were still at lunch. He seemed in good spirits and hopeful, he said, of apprehending the second mate in due course; he volunteered the information that the insurance company was offering ten percent salvage for the stolen gold.

Lamson had a queer feeling in his stomach and was in a fair way of choking on his coffee when he realized that he had it within his means to cash in on some five thousand dollars . . . or go to jail for it if they refused to believe his story.

And besides, what should he do with so much money? Give some of it to the second mate.

It was just like him to get a notion like that. But after all, why not? He, himself, had no need of the money; and Martin could buy himself a nice farm somewhere and settle down on it with his bride. He had a nice, warm feeling while he visualized the girl's face when Martin would tell her about it. . . .

"Another cup of coffee, Mr. Lamson?" Wilke stood by his elbow, waking him out of his speculations.

"Yes, yes, I wouldn't mind."

The steward walked off, slowly and with measured steps which belonged more to a carpeted dining salon than a ship's messroom. That one, too, the wireless operator thought, could do more with the reward than a man named Lamson ever could. He'd be starting a swell restaurant in the forties; he was the right fellow for it and it might make him very happy.

Lamson got up and approached the captain at the head of the table. "I need some replacements," he said calmly. The captain gave him a quick look.

"What's the trouble?"

"A short," Mr. Lamson said. "Been burning out coil after coil. I'll have to have some new ones."

"Could I get them for you?" the captain asked. "I'll be going ashore again tomorrow."

"You wouldn't know how to test them," Lamson said. "They come all different and it is necessary to test them. You'd have to pick out at least a dozen before we'd find two or three that'll work."

"I didn't think it was so complicated," the captain said. "You really need 'em that badly?"

"What do you think? Could you run a ship without a rudder? This is the same thing. Moreover, tomorrow might be too late, unless we're going to stay here a week or more; because the whole thing will have to be overhauled and I may be needing some other things as well if it turns out the coils aren't the only trouble."

"You mean you should get them today?"

"Yes, that's what it amounts to. I bet you someone has been monkeying with this outfit. Maybe that second mate, before he took French leave. Ever since Montevideo I have been having this trouble."

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"Since it is an emergency I suppose I could let you go."

"It's up to you," Mr. Lamson said, as calmly as he could. "If we don't fix this quickly we'll be leaving without a radio and that may get you into plenty of hot water if—"

"All right." The old man cut him short. "You can go ashore with the agent. He is still here. Go with him in his launch."

Inwardly gloating, Lamson left the messroom to get into his going-ashore clothes, the too-wide raglan overcoat and the felt hat with the turned-down brim.

While he stood waiting at the companion, the steward spotted him.

"Are you going ashore, Mr. Lamson? You sure are lucky." There was a good deal of envy in his voice. "Would you mind doing me a favor?"

Lamson felt a cold tremor run down his spine. Was Wilke the one?

"Would you bring me some of those *Quarante Trez* cigarettes? I always smoke 'em when I get down here, but there seems no way of getting 'em now, unless . . ."

"Sure I'll bring you some. Be glad to," Lamson said, feeling relieved. He saw the agent emerge from the Old Man's cabin and they got into the launch. Things had gone more smoothly than he could have hoped for.

ON THE dock the agent asked him how long he'd be about his errands, and Lamson lied about it. He had no intention of being back soon. The agent told the launchman to be on hand and took his leave.

Lamson first did his errand at the radio depot, then went to look up his friend Pareda at the *Ciudad*.

The girl at the switchboard looked incredulous when he asked for Señor Pareda, the ship's news reporter.

"The only Señor Pareda we have is the editor."

"*Hombre chico?*" he asked, holding his hand up shoulder high and hunching his own slim frame.

"*Sí, señor.*" The girl smiled. "Leetle, like yourself."

"That must be the one I want. Tell him Lamson—*el Americano*—wants to see him. It is important."

The girl sent a boy out. Almost at once a door flew open at the far side of the busy room and the boy was pushed aside by an excited Argentine who came dashing between the desks shouting "*Amigo! Amigo!*"

Lamson found himself being taken by the arm and dragged to Señor Pareda's office. There were the hurried queries of friends who had not seen each other in years; then the questioning look when the editor remembered that the boy had said "important."

Lamson explained as quickly as he could—the more easily because news of the theft had already come out. The *Ciudad* had noted the posting of the reward, and the fact that the second mate was under suspicion and supposed to be in hiding in Montevideo.

"Montevideo bad place to hide," Señor Pareda said. "Streets too straight. Anyway, too small a place. You think he is here?"

"Yes," Lamson said, "I think he came on to Buenos Aires on the *Mihanovitch*. I want to find him. He should know what he is up against."

"Cristoforo Colombo!" the editor exploded. "You mean to tell me a man steals fifty thousand *dollares* and not know the consequences?"

"He did not do it," Mr. Lamson said. "He left because he did not like it at sea. He wants to get married."

"How do you know he did not steal

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it?" Pareda asked coolly. "It is in the paper. Everyone thinks he did."

"The gold is still on board. I saw it."

The editor pursed his lips. "This is *very* interesting now," he said. "Maybe good story there, no?"

Lamson agreed that there was a story if they could get to the bottom of it. In his turn, Señor Pareda agreed that undoubtedly the paint cans would be brought ashore by the junkboat. Somehow they'd have to find out when and where, and, if possible, be on hand when it got ashore.

"Then, when we catch the thief we grill him. Third degree, no? He'll tell all and your frien' goes free. And then we find the second mate and give him the good news."

Mr. Lamson nodded gratefully. It was just how he had figured it out himself.

"What you going to do with the reward?" Señor Pareda asked. "Spend in one big blow?"

"I want to give some to Martin," Lamson said. "I figure a man who is willing to start out in a foreign country because he wants his woman with him all the time is entitled to a little boost. I know what it means to live alone and get old that way."

Señor Pareda got up and patted his friend on the back.

"I know, *amigo*. You should have married that girl you told me about."

There was a knock at the door and a young fellow entered, at once bombarding Señor Pareda with a stream of Spanish. The editor gave his friend a look and went to the window, scrutinizing the busy street below. After a while he slowly turned around and waved the young man out of the office.

"*Amigo,*" he said, "Did you tell me all?"

"Practically," Lamson said, wondering what Pareda was driving at. "Why?"

"You were being followed when you came here. There is one man out in the hall and another on the sidewalk below. . . . Listen, *amigo*. You have certain information that others want to have. That is not healthy. Maybe you know where gold is now?"

"That's it. That's what I didn't tell you. I hid it somewhere else. But I did not think the crooks would find that out until they got the paint cans ashore."

"Not crooks watching you, *amigo*. Detectives. Just as bad for third degree if they want information. You're in a tough spot unless we find the real thief. Oh, la, la! What a story!"

"Are you going to let them take me?"

"Let them take you? *Amigo,* are you crazy? I could not let them take you; we got to get the story first. You are not to worry for a little while; later maybe, yes. I get you away from here. Don't worry."

He laughed gayly and rang a bell. The same young reporter entered the office. After a salvo of instructions Lamson found himself being led away, across the floor into a damp cellar stacked high with huge rolls of paper. There was a clammy silence in the vaultlike chamber, accentuated by a vibration from above.

"We're underneath the press rooms," his guide explained. "Here we wait."

FOR some time they sat there in silence while Lamson fumed inwardly at the mess he had plunged himself into. Even the very room he was in now already seemed like a dungeon. A solitary, dust-coated bulb hung from the ceiling.

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"Are you a reporter?" he asked, unable to bear the silence any longer.

"Yes," the other said. "I have been on the *Ciudad* for about four years." He spoke good English.

"You like it?"

"Yes, I guess so," the reporter said, thinking a moment; "only your time isn't your own when you cover the ship."

Lamson fell again into a moody silence.

After what had seemed a lifetime he heard steps. It was Pareda, bringing Lamson's hat and coat which he had left in the office. Again he spoke to the reporter, calling him Salvador, finally telling him to go on his way.

"You don't like it here?" Señor Pareda asked with a pleasant smile.

"You bet I don't," Lamson burst out. "It is a mess. I wanted to walk the streets, sit in a nice café and enjoy myself. And what do I get?"

"Much better than being in a real dungeon," Pareda said, following Lamson's glances around the damp walls.

"Did you find out anything?"

Señor Pareda threw up his hands.

"Not so soon. Must lay groundwork first. Salvador—this young man—is a good reporter, only impatient at times. He wants to get married," Señor Pareda explained with a grin.

"But he knows his way about the waterfront. He is rounding up all the beachcombers, the beggars that hang around the swill cans on the docks. They know what is going on. Anyway, they'll be able to tell us who is running the junkboat in the Boca—now that the owner met with accident."

"An accident?"

"Call it what you like," Señor Pareda went on calmly. "They wasted no time. He got in a fight and broke his arm. It happened this afternoon. I just found out. It means another man is going to take off the paint. It was a good idea."

"What was?"

"Your idea that the junkboat would take off the gold. Now if we can keep an eye on it we know where the gold will land. That is, if it is still in the paint cans." He gave Lamson a quizzical look.

"It isn't."

"But the thief will think it is. And we'll find out who he is when he tries to land it. We'll know this evening, I guess."

Apparently the editor had confidence in his men.

"Do I have to stay here all that time?" Lamson asked, a bit forlornly. Señor Pareda reassured him. The detectives had left after some one had fooled them by wearing Mr. Lamson's hat and coat. He had shaken them without much trouble.

"Detectives *very* clever," Señor Pareda said, "but not too clever."

THEY slipped out of a door into the street and were whisked to a back room in a dive near the waterfront. Occasionally, some seedy-looking beachcomber would drop in, stay near the door and cast a furtive look, not at Señor Pareda, but at a bottle which stood invitingly on the table.

The editor would gravely pour a glass and raising his own as well would hand it over with a becoming: *"Salud, amigo."*

"Salud, señor, y muchas gracias." After which they got down to business. For the most part it was a report on the movements of other junkboats, a measure which tended to make sure that there would be no last minute switch of boats.

After some time Salvador dropped in

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again. His Spanish was too staccato now for Lamson to follow it and he watched the editor's face for signs of good news or bad. Pareda became more and more excited. Finally he turned around.

"What does your friend look like?" he asked sharply.

"Friend? What friend?"

"Your second mate."

"Tall," Mr. Lamson said, quite at a loss, "broad shoulders. Walks with a bit of a limp because he once broke his knee in a—"

The editor cut him short when he saw Salvador vigorously nod his head. "He says he's here, on the waterfront."

Lamson's eyes popped open. "You think he's waiting for the junkboat too? You think he had something to do with it? I can't believe it."

Salvador disregarded his English again and engaged his boss in another rapid-fire conversation.

"He says he's with the captain and he thinks he also recognized one of the men that followed you to my office but it is dark outside and he is not positive."

Mr. Lamson felt his head swim. He could not make head or tail out of it.

"Listen, *amigo*," the other went on, "when the disappearance of that second mate got known, after Montevideo, were you told to communicate with the police?"

"No I wasn't."

"Doesn't that strike you as being *very* funny? How did *you* hear about it?"

"The captain called me to his cabin and told me himself."

"And he told you that he thought the second mate had done the job, but he did not tell you to get in touch with the police when there was still a good chance of catching him.

"Listen, *amigo*, it looks very much like you have been taken for a, what you call it . . . sleighride? Maybe the captain had a reason for wanting the ship to know that the second mate had disappeared and stolen the money."

"What about that letter he left me?"

"What letter?"

Lamson felt in his overcoat and produced Martin's letter. He handed it over and watched Pareda read it slowly, spelling each word.

And then, to his consternation, he saw how the other deliberately tore open the letter he was to hand to the mate's girl. Pareda pulled out two pages, neatly folded.

They were completely blank. There was no trace of writing on them.

"HE SAYS here he took your hint," Pareda said, re-reading the mate's letter. "Does that mean you had a talk with him?"

"Yes, earlier on the trip. I suggested he might start anew in South America if he did not like to remain a sailor all his life. He said he'd not jump ship. Anyway, he said, he did not like it down here."

"So if he would not have written you this letter it would have been hard for you to believe that he had jumped his ship?"

"Yes, naturally."

"And someone else, the real thief for instance, might have become mighty suspicious about the mate's disappearance if you had gone around telling people that he had no thought of doing such a thing?" Señor Pareda went on.

The wireless operator nodded; he saw now what the other was driving at. They had used him to set the stage for putting the real thief off his guard; those two blank pages proved it all too plainly.

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"But I still don't see the whole picture," he said tonelessly.

"Neither do I," Señor Pareda agreed, "at least not yet. But it is obvious your second mate does not deserve your consideration. We wait, things will happen soon enough."

Salvador came rushing in later; and after a few remarks Señor Pareda jumped up, grabbing the wireless operator by the arm and pulling him along through a long corridor and up a staircase to the street. They turned a few corners and then the cold wind from the river blew into Lamson's face.

"Look, quick," the editor cautioned, as he took him by the arm and yanked him back into the shadows. He pointed.

Lamson looked closely and saw outlines that changed their contours.

"Those are your friends from the ship," the editor went on softly. They also seem *very* much interested in the junkboat. You're sure now the gold is not in the paint cans? They got there a little ahead of us, but it won't help them, will it?"

"No," Mr. Lamson said, "it won't help them." Stealthily they moved along, taking up their position within a stone's throw of the waiting group.

"You recognize any of 'em?" Pareda asked in Mr. Lamson's ear.

"That tall one is Martin. The other the captain."

They heard the creaking of oarlocks and waited breathlessly while other forms moved into position. The boat scraped against the dock. A searchlight suddenly played on it and Lamson saw the rowboat now.

A good dozen old paint buckets were in the bottom and two men were standing up, their hands in the air. One of them was Wilke, the steward.

"Get out of that boat," the captain ordered. The two men stepped out.

At this moment the *Ciudad* went into action, photographers and all.

"What's the idea!" the captain shouted. Pareda approached with a press card stuck in his hatband.

"What are you doing here?" the ship's agent asked querulously. "You don't think you are cutting in on this reward?"

"Oh, no," Pareda said lightly. "I only came for the story."

Lamson had stepped back between two railroad cars. He saw the captain and the second mate stand together watching others put handcuffs on Wilke and the junkman. He saw how the captain gleefully patted Martin on the shoulder, before they bent over the paint cans.

"*Amigo, amigo,*" someone called in a whisper. A form was slinking past the box cars. "Come on," Pareda said. "Let's get out of here before they find out it isn't where they think it is."

IN THE morning, the *Ciudad* had the whole story and pictures; front-page stuff. At the police station where they had taken Wilke, the captain and the second mate admitted they had decided to go after the thief themselves, when Martin, just before Pernambuco, had discovered that someone had gotten into the strongroom.

The captain had cabled to New York for instructions from Pernambuco—just as Mr. Lamson had thought—and had been told to keep everyone on board.

The captain and Martin had hit upon the idea of catching the thief on their own account and so cash in on the reward. Everything had run like clockwork—except that the gold had not been found.

Wilke at first had not wanted to talk, taking advantage of the fact that the

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gold had not been found in the boat. He said he had simply used the junk-boat as a means of getting ashore. But the *carabineros* had taken him to a little backroom in the barracks and there he had talked more freely.

Wilke had found the place where the second mate kept the key of the strong-room. It had been little trouble to make off with one of the little cases.

. . . The *Ciudad* promised further developments.

During the morning Señor Pareda appeared, waving an agreement from the insurance company calling for the award to be paid to whoever located the missing gold. At his advice, Mr. Lamson gave out the information and a tug set out almost at once with a driver on board. It took him not more than twenty minutes to find the bucket.

"You want to go back on that ship?" Señor Pareda asked him when he returned with the check.

"No," Mr. Lamson said after a moment's thought. "I don't think it would be a pleasant trip. I guess I'll stay a while. . . . You sure did a neat job, Pareda," he went on.

"I? You're crazy. You gave me the —what you call 'scoop.'"

"By the way"—Mr. Lamson smiled in his quiet, self-conscious manner—"this fellow Salvador, does he really want to get married?"

"Yes, why?"

"And he doesn't have enough money?"

"What are you driving at, *amigo?*"

"I want to give him some of this money. He is a nice fellow."

"Why, you old, soft-hearted fool," Señor Pareda exploded. But then he added, "How much?"

If shaving has you down, my man,
Use Thin Gillettes—look spick-and-span!
They'll give you smooth, quick shaves. What's more—
They cost you just ten cents for four!
Precision made to fit your Gillette Razor exactly!
THIN
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4 for 10c
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The Thin Gillette Blade Is Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

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MEN of
PIRATE-PRIVATEER
WILLIAM DAMPIER, PIRATE AND PRIVATEER, CONTRIBUTED MORE TO THE LORE OF GEOGRAPHY AND CARTOGRAPHY THAN ANY SEAMAN OF HIS TIME.
WM DAMPIER
(FROM AN OLD PRINT)
BORN IN SOMERSETSHIRE, ENGLAND, AS A BOY HE LISTENED TO SAILOR'S YARNS AT THE VILLAGE INN AND DETERMINED TO SAIL UNCHARTED SEAS TO THE WEST. AFTER MINOR VOYAGES, HE SERVED ON THE SAME KING'S SHIP WITH THE NOTORIOUS WILLIAM KIDD IN THE WAR AGAINST HOLLAND.
IN 1672, ON THE WAY TO JAMAICA TO BECOME A PLANTATION MANAGER, HE STARTED HIS FAMOUS "JOURNAL" WHICH HE KEPT RELIGIOUSLY THEREAFTER—CARRIED IT IN A HOLLOW BAMBOO SEALED WITH WAX. A TRY AT LOGWOOD CUTTING PROVED SO UNSUCCESSFUL, HE RECORDED, THAT HE WAS COMPELLED "TO EARN SUSTENANCE BY TURNING PIRATE."
ENDURING AWFUL HARDSHIPS, DAMPIER CROSSED THE ISTHMUS OF PANAMA WITH A BAND OF BUCCANEERS WHO SEIZED TWO SPANISH SHIPS AND PLUNDERED THE SOUTH AMERICAN COAST WHERE "THE ANACONDA," THE JOURNAL STATES, "FLOURISHES ITS TAIL OUT OF THE WATER TO LASSO PASSERSBY."

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

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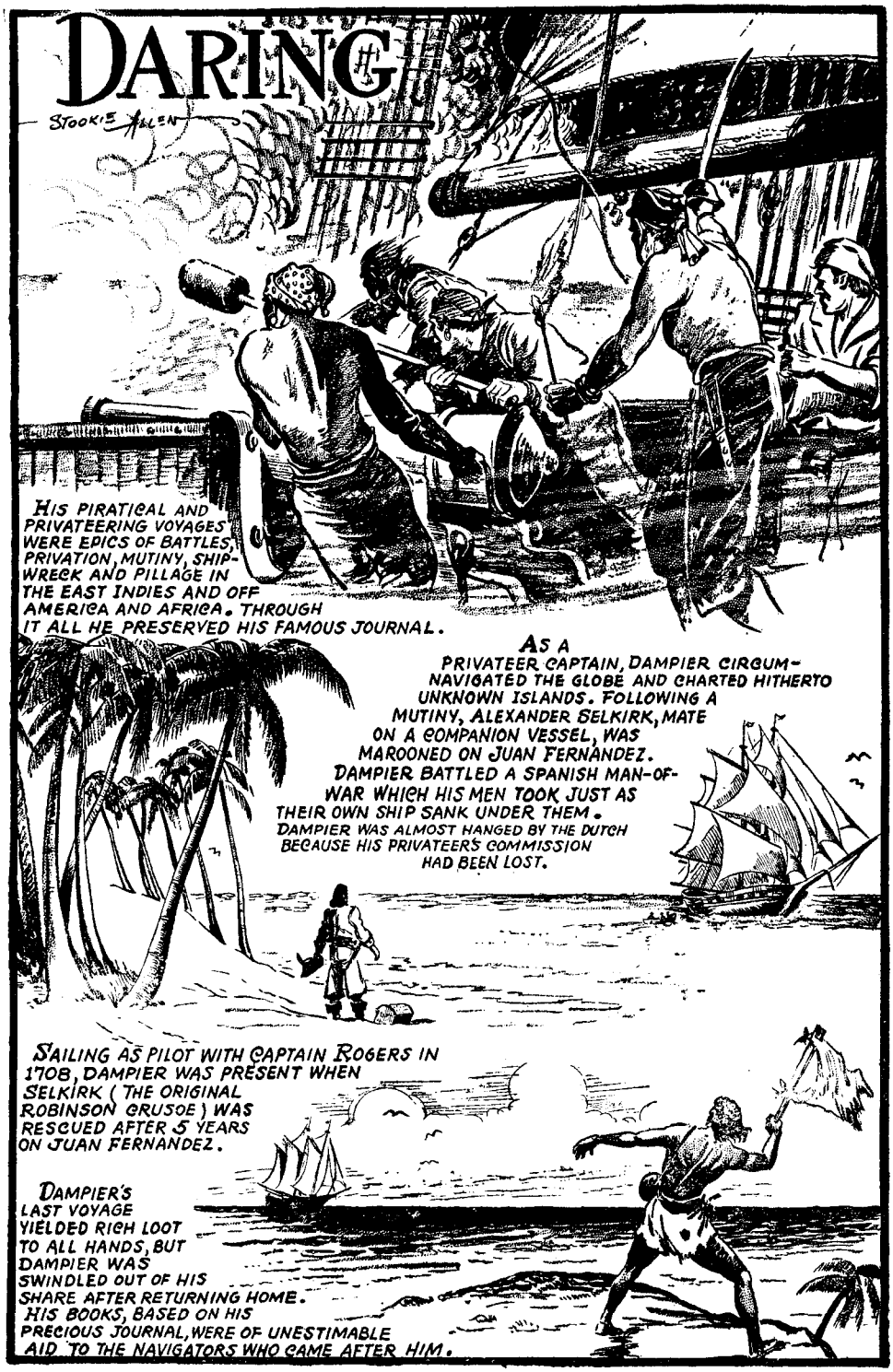
DARING
STOOKIE ALLEN
HIS PIRATICAL AND PRIVATEERING VOYAGES WERE EPICS OF BATTLES, PRIVATION, MUTINY, SHIPWRECK AND PILLAGE IN THE EAST INDIES AND OFF AMERICA AND AFRICA. THROUGH IT ALL HE PRESERVED HIS FAMOUS JOURNAL.
AS A PRIVATEER CAPTAIN, DAMPIER CIRCUMNAVIGATED THE GLOBE AND CHARTED HITHERTO UNKNOWN ISLANDS. FOLLOWING A MUTINY, ALEXANDER SELKIRK, MATE ON A COMPANION VESSEL, WAS MAROONED ON JUAN FERNANDEZ. DAMPIER BATTLED A SPANISH MAN-OF-WAR WHICH HIS MEN TOOK JUST AS THEIR OWN SHIP SANK UNDER THEM. DAMPIER WAS ALMOST HANGED BY THE DUTCH BECAUSE HIS PRIVATEER'S COMMISSION HAD BEEN LOST.
SAILING AS PILOT WITH CAPTAIN ROGERS IN 1708, DAMPIER WAS PRESENT WHEN SELKIRK (THE ORIGINAL ROBINSON CRUSOE) WAS RESCUED AFTER 5 YEARS ON JUAN FERNANDEZ.
DAMPIER'S LAST VOYAGE YIELDED RICH LOOT TO ALL HANDS, BUT DAMPIER WAS SWINDLED OUT OF HIS SHARE AFTER RETURNING HOME. HIS BOOKS, BASED ON HIS PRECIOUS JOURNAL, WERE OF UNESTIMABLE AID TO THE NAVIGATORS WHO CAME AFTER HIM.

Coming soon: Switchboard Heroines

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Apart From Himself

His spiritual body, being invisible, didn't show up in the mirror; but he managed to hold out a match stick and got a satisfactory reflection

By WILLIAM TEMPLETON

Author of "The Playful Powerhouse," "Mr. Primrose Goes to the Devil," etc.

Hitherto unsuspected advantages of Yoga, as demonstrated with complete success by the eminently practical Mr. Fantail. With footnotes on breathing both ways through both nostrils simultaneously

FOR several days Mr. Fantail had been trying to breathe up one nostril and down the other. People frowned at him in busses and moved away from his vicinity when he went to the movies.

His employer, Daniels, apparently noticing him for the first time that year, said irritably, "You'd better do something about that cold, Fantail."

Mr. Fantail made no rejoinder—none was expected of him—but he contented himself with a pitying glance through his glasses. This was no cold.

Miss Lacey, the typist, saw the expression on his face and smiled as she polished her nails. He looked across at her and was disturbed. She had a flamboyant attractiveness that never

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failed to excite him. He kept on looking.

He wanted to speak to her but could think of nothing to say until she offered him a subject by easing the bracelet on her arm for the second time since he had raised his head.

"That's new," he said. "It's very—smart." He had a habit of pausing as if searching for the correct word and finally deciding on the most banal one.

"Yes," she told him, "I got it only this morning. A present." Satisfied with having evoked comment, she returned her attention to her nails.

Mr. Fantail looked at his reflection in the inkwell, a precise-looking little man who could not afford to give presents to women, and smiled ruefully. In an attempt to escape sinking into self-pity he bent once more over his ledger.

But only in something more academic than clerking could he find consolation; and in a few minutes he continued his breathing experiment.

AT SIX O'CLOCK he was released and gulped a hasty cafeteria supper, returning as quickly as he could to his bed-sitting room.

He snapped on the light, a naked bulb swinging from the center of the ceiling, and lit the gas fire, carefully reducing it to a more economical height.

From his bedside he lifted a book, austerely titled *Yoga,* and sat down to read.

It had been lent him by the only woman in his life, a Miss Wilkinson, the secretary of the local literary society of which he was a member; and since he had opened it dutifully at the first page it had engrossed him.

After a prefatory exposition it listed attested wonders which had been accomplished by devout Yogi after years of rigorous training. It was possible evidently to breathe up one nostril and down the other simultaneously, although Mr. Fantail had not found it so.

There was, of course, no obvious advantage in success, but he would have been content with the accomplishment however barren. From it he might proceed to Yogi practices which would be more applicable to his daily life.

There was the fascinating hope that he would eventually be able to divorce his spirit from its encumbering flesh.

Reading further and pondering on the matter he began to wonder whether one-way breathing was, as he had at first assumed, simpler than that. Excited and encouraged by this thought he went to bed early and lay in the gloom attempting to cast his mind beyond his body.

In an excess of concentration he fell asleep.

ON THE following evening he attended a meeting of the literary society and listened attentively to the visiting lecturer. Afterward he walked home with Miss Wilkinson.

She always gave so much attention to his theories about life that he was flattered into liking her. There seemed little likelihood of his ever becoming any more friendly with any other woman, and if he could have afforded it he would have asked her to marry him.

Occasionally in their walks nowadays his mind conjured up a rival picture of the glamorous Miss Lacey, but he quickly put aside all traitorous thoughts.

He was too conscious of his own physical shortcomings to expect to arouse the interest of a woman on any but the spiritual plane; and Miss Wilkinson was always prepared to meet him there.

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Before giving him the book she had said, "I think you'll be interested. We do seem to be interested in the same things, don't we? I sometimes think we must have a spiritual affinity."

Several times on the way home it was in his mind to ask her views on Yoga; but he restrained himself, hoping that when they did speak of it he would be able to impress her by nonchalantly breathing up one nostril and down the other or even by some more spectacular display.

He had been thinking about it in silence for several minutes when he realized that his companion was breathing more deeply than normal. He turned his head and regarded her. Suddenly conscious of his scrutiny she giggled and said, "Silly of me. I do my breathing exercises without thinking nowadays."

Mr. Fantail said nothing, but he felt a glow of satisfaction that they should be on the same quest. She had undoubtedly been trying to breathe up one nostril and down the other simultaneously.

He was tired when he arrived at his room and it was only a sense of competition which drove him to attempt a few exercises once his head had touched the pillow.

He had sleepily decided to abandon them for the night when he turned and realized with something of a shock that he was no longer in the bed at all but resting on the air somewhere slightly above it, and looking down on what appeared to be his body.

HE WAS surprised and scared. Not for a moment had he expected this to happen after so few attempts. For a long time he just lay in suspension looking down on his familiar features and puzzling what to do next.

He regretted switching off the light before going to bed. He had difficulty in discerning the objects in his room and from this position they looked strange and terrifying.

A cloud passed and moonlight struck across the bed. The figure under the blankets turned and faced the wall. It was lighter now. Mr. Fantail could see the accumulation of dust on top of the wardrobe.

At last, very gently, he attempted to move. He found that by pressing his hands on the air he could propel himself with amazing ease. He rose higher toward the ceiling.

Then, after over-reaching it in his first few attempts, he steered himself in front of the mirror.

He was prepared for what he saw —the room, shadowy in the moonlight, with no sign of anything floating about —but it was none the less disturbing to prove that his spirit was invisible. It was so recently emancipated that he was still conscious of arms and legs and still guided himself by pressing on the surrounding air.

He lowered himself and attempted to raise the book by his bedside. It had become impossibly heavy and his efforts did not move it.

Looking around for something lighter he saw a burnt matchstick. Even this seemed absurdly heavy, but he managed to lift it and float with it before the mirror. Through the glass it seemed to be dangling unsupported in the air, dancing crazily about in the room as he waved his hand.

When he had satisfied himself with this experiment he ventured farther afield. The window was open and he passed horizontally out. As he moved away from his body on the bed he became cold and began to lose control.

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Far below he could see the red glow of a watchman's fire and a man huddled over it brewing something in a can. He was surprised to see the man's newspaper blown from his knee to sweep away into the darkness. He himself could feel no wind.

Suddenly afraid he retreated through the window and, gliding quickly to the bed, merged again with his body.

HE FELT quite calm about the experience next morning. The fact that he had, for the first time, done something outstanding gave him confidence to face the day.

Unfortunately it was the day Daniels had chosen to tell him that, times being difficult, orders few and overhead expenses higher than ever, a ten per cent reduction of salary was reluctantly being imposed on the whole staff.

"At times like these we must all make sacrifices," said Daniels, pressing out a half-smoked cigar in his ashtray, and covertly watching Mr. Fantail's reaction.

Mr. Fantail could only stammer his regrets that business was so bad. When he had gone sadly from the room his employer lit a fresh cigar.

Mr. Fantail glanced at the typist as he passed to his desk. He would have liked to re-assert his optimism by confiding in her about his experience of the night before, but he doubted that she would be interested.

Again in the evening he tried to forget his worries and free his spirit. It took longer this time. He was distracted by a tapping on the window-pane for which he could find no cause.

Twice he was on the point of freedom only to be cheated of it, first by a comb falling from the dressing table and then by a matchstick striking his face. Eventually, however, by perseverence, he found himself once more suspended above the bed.

"I'm glad you managed it," said the voice of Miss Wilkinson.

He shot up toward the ceiling with surprise. when he had regained control of himself he asked, "Is there anyone in the room?"

"I'm in the corner by the dressing table," said the voice. "Look." Mr. Fantail looked and saw a match dancing about above the mirror.

"Then—you've managed to escape too?" he asked, conversationally.

"Yes. I thought if we both tried together we might achieve something. That's why I lent you the book. We have such a strong spiritual affinity that something was bound to happen if we both concentrated on leaving our bodies."

"I see," said Mr. Fantail. "What do we do now?"

"The night's ours," she answered rather skittishly. "Let's go on a voyage of discovery."

Bolder now because he was no longer alone Mr. Fantail followed the matchstick out of the window.

When he returned it was still dark. There was an evening newspaper lying on his bedtable which had not been there when he left. Curious as to how it came to be there he glanced at the date and was astonished to read: *October 8.*

He had left the room on the night of October 6. He must have been away from his body for two complete days. Appalled, he sank down into the bed.

In the morning he left for the office with a feeling of deep guilt for his truancy. When Daniels asked for an explanation of the two days' abscence it would be impossible to tell him the truth.

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This worried him. That his body had traveled at least far enough to obtain an evening paper afforded him no misgiving. He failed to make the ominous deduction from the fact.

MISS LACEY was straightening the seam of her stocking when he entered. She looked at him curiously. "Daniels wants you in the sanctum," she told him.

He knocked on the door of Daniels' room and entered, completely unprepared for the words that greeted him.

Daniels, in a voice which carried a note of respect, said, "Good morning, Fantail. I just wanted you to know at once that I agree to the proposals you made yesterday. I've taken all you said into consideration and as you pointed out so convincingly it's not a salary cut you deserve, but an increase.

"Incidentally, I want you to deal personally with the Simpson and Harmsworth order at once. Give them the same line of talk you gave me."

There was a long pause while the bewildered Mr. Fantail searched for a word.

"Thanks," he said at last.

When he had returned to his desk he bent across to Miss Lacey. "Was I here yesterday?" he asked.

She smiled. "You were here all right." She remained looking at him with a strange expression.

. . . He met Miss Wilkinson in the evening and walked some distance with her, but neither of them spoke of the previous days' experience. In the light of day, with the noise of the streets in their ears, the adventure took a more fantastic and dream-like appearance than ever, and each was reluctant to mention it lest it prove to have been no more than a product of imagination.

Instead Mr. Fantail told her of his increased salary, and her congratulations made his eyes glow with pride behind his glasses. He thought: I can afford to get married now, and we certainly have a lot in common.

That night, before freeing his spirit, Mr. Fantail hesitated for a moment. "I wonder what my body is going to do without me tonight," he thought. He had a certain reluctance to leave it to its own devices. . . .

When he found himself once more hovering over the bed he said. "Are you there, Miss Wilkinson?"

Near the window a match was suspended in midair and, seeing it, he passed after it into the night.

It was again two days before he returned and this time he had some difficulty in re-entering his body.

"Sorry," said a polite voice, "I didn't expect you back so soon."

Mr. Fantail hurriedly sank into himself before he worried about the speaker. Satisfied that he was again in possession of his body, he sat up and looked about him. There had been something sinister and mocking about the voice, but there was no one in the room.

On the bed-table was another evening newspaper.

WHEN he arrived at the office in the morning, he had just hung up his hat when Daniels came out of his room and crossed to the desk.

"Congratulations, Fantail, old man," he said jovially. "You did a brilliant bit of work on that Simpson and Harmsworth job. There's going to be a bonus for you at the end of the month."

When his employer had gone with a friendly wave of his hand Mr. Fantail beamed delightedly and bewilderedly across at Miss Lacey.

She smiled and lowered her eyes

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to the floor. If Mr. Fantail could believe his glasses she was blushing.

In a sudden access of courage he said, "That sounds like a reason to celebrate, Miss Lacey. Are you doing anything tonight?"

"No," she said softly. "Naturally after last night I kept tonight free. . . ."

Mr Fantail searched frantically for a word. "Really?" he said. . . .

It was late when he went to bed. Tired and happy he crept between the sheets. Something was tapping against the window-pane, but he turned over and tried to ignore it.

After a long time a voice said, "Aren't you coming out of yourself tonight?" It was a masculine voice, the one he had heard when he had returned to find his body already occupied.

Mr Fantail sat up in bed and stared into the dim room. "No," he said, "I'm staying where I am tonight. Things are much better now."

"Whatever you say," said the voice resignedly. "But if ever you want me to take over for you again don't hesitate."

"Don't worry," said Mr. Fantail into the darkness. "Everything's fine. I don't expect I'll leave my body again for quite a long time."

"Too bad," said the voice good-naturedly, "too bad, but life can't be a bowl of cherries all the time. I'd better slip along and see if I can do anything for your bluestocking friend, the Wilkinson woman. Au revoir. . . ."

There was a pause and the voice came again from near the window. "Don't forget I'm ready to take over any time you want, Fantail. I was growing very fond of that typist. . . ."

The curtains fluttered slightly. There was a faint smell of sulphur in the room.

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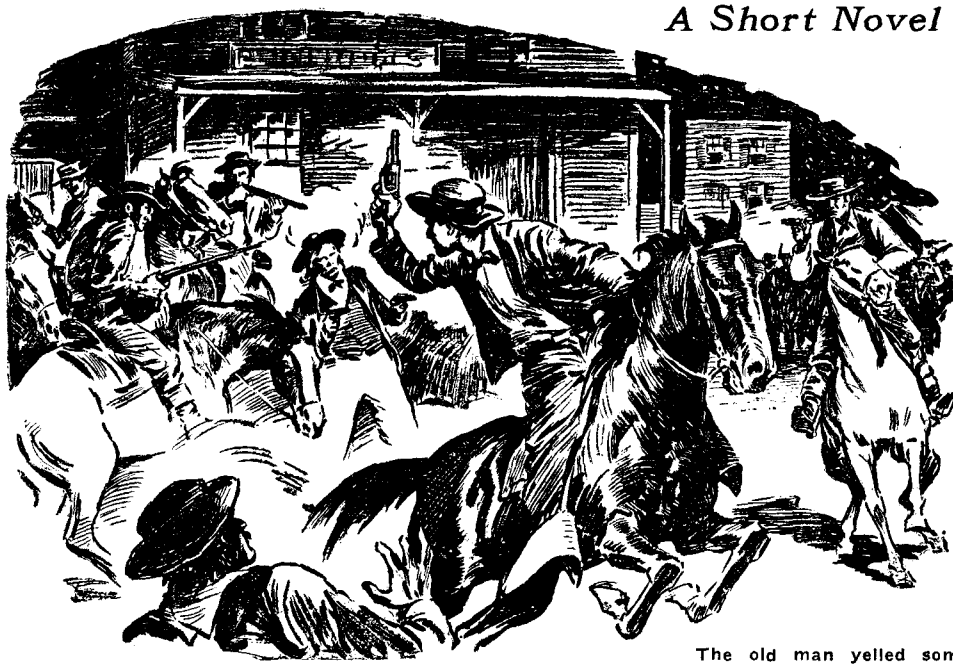
A Short Novel



The old man yelled something, but in the uproar of shots and shouts, Buck didn't wait to hear it

No Guns Wanted

By C. K. SHAW

Author of "Stagecoach Johnny," "White Whelp," etc.

This here sprig, ladies and gents, is Buck Ebberly, who might better be tagged Kid Rumpus. He's just turned sixteen; he's quick with his guns and his fists; his temper's even hotter than his head; and he's pretty well discovered the secret of perpetual commotion. Ride along with him to Idaho—and don't forget to duck

CHAPTER I

SADDLE AND RIDE

A LINE stands so much pressure, then it snaps; a jug holds so much water, then it spills over. And young Buck Ebberly's emotions were close to snapping, to spilling over. He was hearing Joe say things he'd never even guessed Joe felt. At first he had been stunned and mute but now his hurt was turning to anger and bitterness. His nerves were stiffening; a what-the-hell light was beginning to show in his eyes. That light should have been a warning to Joe, for it was burning out the earlier look of stricken anguish. But Joe's flat voice went on relentlessly and Buck's young face was streaked with perspiration that trickled from forehead to chin.

The walls of the home where he and

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Joe had lived were shrinking into remoteness. They were as dim and strange as Joe, standing there by the table talking in an empty voice. Or was it empty? The words were like knives cutting into Buck's flesh, deeper and deeper.

The letter lay on the table between them—just a piece of white paper closely covered with Uncle Simmian's precise writing. Buck felt he almost knew what it said by heart. In closely guarded words, offering nothing really concrete, Uncle Simmian suggested that Buck, whom he had never seen, should come to him.

None of it was said outright, but it seemed to promise that if Buck worked hard and showed he had the stuff in him, there would be no limit to how far he could go. Perhaps even—someday—when Simmian Ebberly died, the bank might be his. That was part of Uncle Simmian's message; it was the other part that had so deeply enraged young Buck. For Uncle Simmian, still without coming right out and saying so, made it all too plain that Joe was not to be included in the deal. Uncle Simmian had heard of Joe's shooting scrapes; he intimated that he considered Joe too far gone in lawlessness and general iniquity to be worth the chance he so plainly expected to dazzle Buck.

And that made Buck fume with rage. Uncle Simmian could take his bank and blow it up, for all of him.

That was what Joe would say, too. But then Joe came in and read the letter through very quietly, his sun-browned face not changing at all, and said, flatly and without any fuss:

"Banking would be nice work, youngster."

"Banking! Sweeping floors!"

Joe studied Buck's face for a minute before he spoke again; and when he did, his tone was sharp with anger.

"Sweeping floors would pay for your keep, anyhow," he said. Maybe he didn't see Buck flinch. Maybe he didn't care. He went on: "You never have earned your way in your life and you're two months past sixteen. Buck, it's time you started to shift for yourself."

JOE kept on talking, now and then nodding toward the letter lying on the table between them. Joe wasn't fooling, his face was blue as skimmed milk. He meant all the things he was saying. His gunhands were clinched; Buck had never seen them so rigid.

Joe was cleanly and powerfully built, with smooth strong shoulders and hips, and lean muscles lying close to long bones. Flat and neat in every line. Buck had always been content to bask in Joe's reflected glory, and Joe had taken enough from life for both of them.

When Buck was six and crying because his dad was dead, Joe had taken over. He told Buck he would take care of him the same as Dad always had—and he did. It came to Buck now with shock that he *had* never really worked. Sure, he had cooked and cleaned the stable and run errands. But he had never earned a dollar.

Joe's eyes were smoky-hot, his dark brows bunched above them. He looked at his kid brother. Buckskin-colored eyes and hair that had given him the name of Buck. Slender as a sapling, but quick, even when he so much as wiped away a trickle of sweat. There was a kind of blood-quality to the kid that Joe sensed without wholly understanding.

"I told you I'd look after you when Dad died, Buck, and I have. Lately I've passed up a couple of good deals for you. Last year when Curly Maynard was on the jump he wanted a pard. Curly was headed for big things and

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was looking for a man to stand at his back, one he could trust.

"He spoke to me. I couldn't drag a kid along with me and I couldn't leave you to the wolves. A few weeks back Oregon Haines was throwing together a tough bunch and offered me a juicy slice to join him. I couldn't because a kid along would be dangerous.

"I've never balked on my promise to you, Buck. It's up to you not to balk now you've got a chance to get on your own. It—may not be too late for me to get in with Oregon Haines." Smoke films were weaving in Joe's dark eyes.

The drenching sweat had dried on Buck's body; the tremor had left his lips. Joe hadn't minced words any of the time. The boy's hurt enveloped him, scorching the flesh that a few moments before had been chilled with cold drops. He was angry.

There was no reason to the thoughts burning in his brain. His love for Joe, everything, was crowded to the wall. Blistering words tumbled from his lips.

"I didn't know I was holding you back like a log-chain around your neck. I thought we were having a swell time. I forgot I was just a kid and that you were a man and wouldn't want me hanging around all the time. I'll go pronto. I'll get out of town so fast you can't bat your eye. You can hunt up Oregon Haines and join up."

Joe began to count out some money. He slid it across the table. Buck pushed it back.

"I don't want that!"

Joe picked up the money and came around the table. "Buck, don't be a baby about this thing. Getting mad and refusing this dough hurts both of us. You'll need it for food and for grain for Ringy on the trip to Idaho. You'll need new clothes so Uncle Simmian won't have to advance you money. I mean a good suit and shoes. Your boots are expensive, but they aren't for a bank."

Buck stood stiff, but his eyes batted rapidly as he caught a little softening in Joe's voice. He bit back his pride and faced his brother.

"I'm more grown up than you think, Joe. Let me get work around here so if you get in any tough spots with the Haines gang I'll be on hand. You don't know what I can do in a tight, Joe, you've never given me a chance. You've always stepped into the squeezes and took over."

"If you don't go to Uncle Simmian, I'll stick with you a year or so yet. You're just a kid. I wouldn't feel right unless you were with one of the blood, I'd feel like I'd deserted you."

BOYISHNESS was gone from Buck's face. Of a sudden, he did look older. Slim, almost fragile, he stood and dignity dropped a blanket over his stiff young shoulders. The eyes were steady in his white face. "I'll go to Uncle Simmian. I don't want to keep you from hooking up with Oregon Haines. I'll be gone in an hour."

Joe said in the morning would be right to start. Tonight they would go over the route leading from Oregon to Idaho. Buck was rigidly attentive as Joe drew maps for him and passed out brief bits of advice.

It wasn't Joe's way to set his word up as law, but Buck knew older men often came to him to talk over their problems. The plan for the journey was finished and the minutes began to tick away in brittle silence.

Loneliness set up an ache in Buck's heart. He tried to ride it down by ridicule, but it was as beyond his control as the pull of the tide. Never before had he felt lonely with Joe, but never before had Joe let on he was in the way.

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Buck was up early the next morning. Joe had lain still in his bed during the night, but it hadn't seemed to Buck that his brother was sleeping. Sometimes in sleep, a man moves or catches his breath. Joe had not stirred.

Buck knew, because he had lain looking out the small window at the stars, seeing them in a new way. Hearing noises in the creaky old house that he had never heard before. That morning he made the coffee as usual. He had never realized what a pleasure it was just to make coffee and set the table and wash up the dishes. He did it all, even though Joe was nervous for him to be off. He wanted to leave the house swept out and clean.

That was all he had ever done for Joe and he didn't want to neglect it this last morning.

Ringy rolled his eyes when the saddle hit his cold back, and quit nosing his hay. Buck led him out of the barn and mounted, then he rode through the gate Joe was holding open. He wondered how a fellow said goodbye to his brother. Casual, of course. Joe was walking toward him, his hat drawn low.

The early morning light made his face a ghastly green as though his dark skin had been drained of the rich blood beneath it. Joe held up his hand.

"Don't welsh on the job, Buck," he said. "Don't expect things to be rosy at the start, they never are. Remember you're working toward a pretty big thing."

Working toward a big thing! Maybe Joe called being cooped up inside a bank big. Buck didn't. The idea sickened him clear down to the root.

But just the same, he said: "I'll make good, Joe." And it was a solemn promise.

They shook hands. "Don't worry about me. I told you yesterday, I'm more grown up than you think." He picked up the reins. "Do you suppose you'll ever happen up north?" Then, to make the question more casual, "Oregon Haines moves a lot."

Joe was fumbling in his pocket for the makings, changed his mind and turned to close the barn gate. "No telling, Buck. If I do, I'll look you up."

"Yeah."

Buck touched Ringy with the spurs. Ringy hit up a single-foot, pattering the hard earth with perfect rhythm. Ringy did not know he was single-footing out of that barnyard for the last time.

CHAPTER II

SMOKY JOE

BUCK'S anger thinned and dried up as the miles slid beneath Ringy's hoofs. He took to whistling to keep up his spirits. Joe had stood by him when he needed him and he'd still be standing by but for this unexpected release. Buck admitted that release was the only word that fitted. He couldn't stay mad at Joe, it hurt too much. Since he'd thought it out, the weight in his chest had lightened some. He whistled until his lips were too dry to produce sound.

He talked to Ringy, promising him they were going to make good and show the world and Uncle Simmian and Joe that they were not just a pair of bangtails. They would even open up their own bank and then they'd take Joe in as a partner. Buck's thoughts became tangled at this point. Joe didn't just seem to fit into the banking world. Joe might, but not Oregon Haines.

After that thought, the whistle didn't stir his lips for many miles. He was beginning to understand what was worrying him. It was Joe joining out with Oregon Haines. Haines hired men

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for big jobs—nobody knew what the jobs were. How far would Joe go?

He rode on and on.

"We have to make good fast, Ringy," he said. "We got to own our own bank and send for Joe." He felt a chill of fear for Joe, then a hot drop burned the corner of his eye. He dashed at the spot blindly.

"I said I was grown up! Here I'm just a blubbering baby the way Joe said." He stiffened in the saddle, and gritted his teeth. He was finished with blubbering.

He decided to forget Joe for the time being, but even Ringy reminded him. Joe had bought Ringy for him saying he had bottom, speed and everything a horse needed, except looks. Joe had grinned. "He's kinda ringy-looking, Bucky, but looks won't keep him from covering the ground." So they had named him Ringy.

Ringy missed Joe too. Buck could tell he was wondering what they were doing three days on the trail alone. Ringy didn't have the right confidence in the journey. Each morning he had swung his nose for home when Buck had mounted. This morning Buck threatened him with cremation if he repeated the blunder.

Buck had spent money in Portland for dress-up clothes, but he didn't feel at home in them. Ringy slopped along, used now to the new tassels on his bridle, wondering perhaps who had taken time to make tassels to dangle against a horse's jaw.

IT WAS in Walla Walla that Buck saw the notice of a bank robbery committed by Oregon Haines and his gang. Two men killed. Haines' description was in big print.

Buck was eating supper in a restaurant when he saw the reward notice tacked on the wall. He slid off his stool.

"What's the matter short-horn, don't the grub suit you?" the waiter called after him.

It took Buck a moment to understand. Oh, the beefsteak. Yes, it was good but he wasn't much hungry tonight.

He swerved away from the reward notice because the waiter's question had centered attention on him. He sauntered about, his hands clinched in his pockets. It was torture. He could feel that poster burning into him every way he turned. Was Joe's description in that smaller print that he couldn't make out from a distance?

At last he was beneath it, glancing up. Racing through it roughly at first, then slowly. They hadn't spotted Joe. A man began to read over his shoulder.

"Two men killed in bank stickup." The fellow whistled. "Portland. Durn saps, why pick a place where there's a law on every bush? Two killed." He spelled out some more. "Headed north, maybe Walla Walla, probably the new mining district opened on the Clearwater River. Durn saps, they shoulda headed for Idaho and rode around Portland. Their goose is cooked now!"

Buck sat in the corner of the restaurant during the next hour, hoping to hear some news. His big hat was drawn low. Occasionally a loafer kidded him about the pearl-handled gun he wore in a hip holster, or asked why he didn't come out from under the hat for a breath. He grinned crookedly and let it all pass.

He knew now why Joe hadn't wanted him, why Oregon Haines couldn't take kids. Bank robbery was a serious thing. It took seasoned men. Joe's word: seasoned. Buck's stomach kicked. Joe was right, bank-robbing wouldn't be any

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job for him. And it wasn't any job for Joe.

Buck rose to leave. Every man that came into the room had heard a new rumor; it was maddening. He returned to the stable and asked the barnman for a comb and brush.

"What, goin' to swab that maggoty horse some more?"

"Going to make sure there is no caked sweat on his back, don't want him galded. Thanks."

Buck walked into the stall and spoke softly to Ringy. He leaned against the friendly shoulder and his fingers rubbed idly over the nose. Then he set to work with the currycomb and brush.

His hands flashed in time with his thoughts. Ringy was brushed until he felt like a racer. He liked it so much he took time from his hay to wipe his muzzle on Buck.

"We got to move fast, Ringy!" Buck whispered. "We can't waste a day. We must get a place for Joe to come to." He was crying under his breath, and both his hands were occupied. He let the tears trickle. He didn't care if he was blubbering.

Joe was being chased by the law. They hadn't spotted him, but they might any time. Some of the gang had been wounded and Joe would hold back for them, Buck knew. Joe was faster than lightning with a gun and would fight like a lion if cornered. The way he had always fought for his kid brother.

"We got to make good fast!" he whispered again. Ringy brushed his nose on Buck's arm to show he was willing.

THE next morning Buck rode on toward Lewiston, following the stage road. His first wild fear had subsided. Joe was safe for the time being. With Joe and Oregon Haines both to trick a posse, they would get away. His reason told him this and his fear of immediate danger for Joe lessened.

But the long night hours had strengthened his determination to do something to get Joe away from Oregon Haines.

"He's taken care of us all our lives," he said to Ringy. "What have we done for him? Washed a few dishes, eaten bread and oats and spent his money. It's his money that's bedding us down nights now. We gotta do something!"

Ringy kept to his mile-eating pace. Buck stopped along the way to talk to freighters and stray horsemen. He didn't have to work around to the robbery, they were all talking of it. It seemed certain now the gang was headed for Idaho. Buck arrived in Lewiston that night.

The town was aglow. It had passed the rag stage and was a substantial town of wooden and brick and stone buildings. Steamers came up the Snake from the Columbia; freight wagons lumbered in from Walla Walla. Up in the headwaters of the Clearwater and Salmon, a great country was giving up its gold. Lewiston was the distributing point.

Pack-trains of fifty and seventy-five mules left her doorstep, bound for the mountain districts. Florence and Elk City and a dozen other boom towns depended on her. The business street crowded into the triangle made by the converging of the Snake and Clearwater rivers, was whipped with as much commotion as the rivers themselves. Brown hills towered, blank to all that was going on beneath their brows.

Buck rode up to the livery stable and told the barn-man that he would curry his own horse. By the light of a hanging lantern, Buck saw a reward notice tacked on the rough board wall.

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"There is talk in Walla Walla that Oregon Haines is headed for Idaho," he observed, knowing that Joe's way would have been to have passed up all talk.

"He'll head out toes-up if he does," snapped the fellow. "Curt Lowe is a sheriff that don't monkey around with them two-bit killers. Lowe shoots for the heart when he draws a bead on a feller like Oregon Haines."

Buck finished currying Ringy, drew his hat low and walked up town.

There was nothing but talk of the robbery. Some said a posse was closing in on Haines; others hooted the idea. Sheriff Curt Lowe moved through a crowd in front of a dance hall, flanked by an alert deputy.

Buck had never before felt the menace of the law, but tonight the sight of the two badges was like a cold draft. Lowe and his deputy were the only men that were not shooting off their mouths. They were listening.

Then a lath-thin man appeared, sliding through the crowd like a wraith at a Fourth of July celebration. Lanky Monroe. A gunman who had stopped a few days with Joe last winter. Lanky and Joe had argued over which was faster, a belly-holster or one tied to your thigh. Joe favored the latter, while Lanky wore his gun laced across his concave middle.

The sheriff was watching the new arrival.

Buck didn't spot Lanky in time to draw back. The gunman saw him and paused. Lanky had eyes the color of rain on the silver mountings of your saddle, and a dead light hung in their depths.

He tossed a condescending nod toward Buck. "Howdy, yearlin'. Where's Smoky Joe?"

Some called Joe "Smoky" because of the clouds that swept his eyes in times of stress. Lanky moved closer.

"Howdy," Buck said, and felt the stare of the sheriff transferred from Lanky to his own face. "Joe isn't with me."

Lanky showed languid interest. "How come Smoky Joe let you out from under his eye? He allus watches you like a henhawk does a chicken. How come, kid?"

"Just come," Buck said sharply. "He's quit riding herd on me."

"Quarreled, huh? Kid, you've pulled out on the best friend you'll ever have. Damn a kid, nohow! You can do everything for them and they'll fly up the crick and quit you the first time you cross 'em."

Buck just looked at him for a second. "Lanky, mind your own business."

THE crowd rippled. The fuzz-faced kid was standing straight as a ramrod, telling Lanky Monroe to mind his own business. Lanky Monroe! Lanky's face didn't change. "I never realized you was so much like Joe," he said. "Forget it, kid. Let out and take a chaw of tabaccy. Joe is a mighty good friend of mine and I opened my mouth and talked out of turn, when I thought you'd handed him a raw deal. I'll just mind my own business like you say."

Part of this was too low for straining ears, but the crowd knew Lanky wasn't making the kid cakewalk or sing Susannah. They regarded Buck with special interest as Lanky walked away.

The sheriff stepped close enough to see beneath Buck's big hat. "Come over to my office," he ordered. He moved a step away, but not far enough to lose command of the situation. He wasn't sure the whippersnapper kid would obey. He wasn't going to; the sapling body was coming erect.

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"I just want to talk to you. Not afraid to answer a few questions, are you? The latchstring ain't hangin' out to strangers tonight."

Buck decided he'd better show the sheriff he wasn't afraid. He followed him across the street.

"Where's your brother?" The sheriff shot the question like gunfire.

Buck was standing in the light of a lamp in the office of his jail. "Know my brother, do you?" Buck asked quietly.

"I've heard of Smoky Joe. I saw you come in on an Oregon horse, and eastern Oregon is the range of Smoky Joe Ebberly. Lanky Monroe just now mentioned him as your brother."

"Bull's-eye," Buck replied, drawing his powers together. "You asked how Joe was—he's fine."

"When you expectin' him in Lewiston?"

"He might be around next summer."

"Better answer on the barrelhead. It'll be better for both you and your gun-slingin' brother if you do. Have you come to feel things out for Smoky Joe?"

"No!" Buck clipped the word short.

"Then why are you here?"

Buck felt the lawman's suspicion thickening. He was getting his mind centered on Joe. That must be broken up; he must be thrown off the track. Buck pushed his hat to the back of his head and grinned.

"Sheriff, I'm here to see my uncle. He wrote for me to come."

"Who is your uncle?"

"Simmian Ebberly. I guess plenty of folks know Simmian Ebberly."

That jarred the sheriff loose from his hold on Joe. His train of thought flew the track; its wreck was registered in his face.

"Simmian Ebberly the banker? Yeah, same name as yours. By thunder!"

Buck took his uncle's letter from his vest pocket. "Uncle Simmian was my father's oldest brother," he said, holding the envelope carelessly so the sheriff could read Simmian Ebberly's return in the corner. "I've never seen him so I brought this along to prove who I was. It's a little late to see him tonight, guess I'll wait until morning."

Sheriff Curt Lowe said it would not be advisable to rouse the old man at this hour, even to see his nephew.

"You better get you a room and go to bed," he told Buck, turning back to his business of running the town. "There's some tough birds in tonight; might even some of Oregon Haines' gang fan through. The less clutterin' on the street the better."

"I won't clutter things none if you're expecting Oregon Haines," Buck said. "I'll find that room pronto."

"By thunder!" muttered the sheriff walking away. "By thunder. So Smoky Joe is a nephew of old Simmian Ebberly the banker!"

Buck hunted a room and went to bed

CHAPTER III

EBBERLY GOLD—AND EBBERLY GUNS

THE next morning Buck slicked Ringy down, took off his pearl-handled gun and placed it in a saddle pocket, brushed the horsehairs off his suit and called at the Ebberly bank. It was a strong, solid building with large windows. Buck asked a clerk where he would find Simmian Ebberly.

The fellow pointed across the room to a man behind a gleaming desk. "Ask Mr. Fisher."

Buck approached the polished desk and again asked for Simmian Ebberly. "I'll hear what you have to say, young man," Mr. Fisher said.

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Buck met the expressionless eyes. "I've come to see my uncle."

"You are not—" Mr. Fisher was floundering, studying the slight, light-haired boy.

"Yes I am. May I see my uncle?"

Mr. Fisher rose. "Certainly, he's expecting you. Come with me."

Buck was led into a large room with a soft carpet and another of the gleaming desks. Fisher announced him with a little uncertainty. A man over six feet rose and waved for Fisher to withdraw. He was very old, but plenty of solid flesh still padded his long bones. He had iron-gray hair and brows shaped like Joe's. The eyes were also like Joe's, not cruel but exerting a quiet pressure. A mark of the Ebberly clan.

Simmian Ebberly inspected the boy. His glance slid from the slim body back to the face. Buckskin eyes and finely wrought features. A jaw that did not jut, yet managed to stand firm against the steady scrutiny. His brow smoothed from its first quick puckering of surprise. He extended his hand.

"You do not resemble the Ebberlys."

Buck found the hand warm and firm. "Joe is more like the Ebberlys I recall Dad saying."

"Sit down. I shall have to ask your name, young man. You were born after I had lost track of my brother Joseph."

"Buck is what they call me."

"I'd rather have your real name."

"Well—it's Simmian, but that was bucked out of the saddle years ago." He grinned. "You're big enough to pack the name, I'm not."

Simmian Ebberly rubbed his chin and smiled faintly. "How old are you—Buck?"

"Sixteen and two months past."

"And Joe, you just mentioned him, did he object to your coming?"

"No sir."

"Have you come to stay with me?"

"I hope to stay, Uncle Sim-mian. Do you mind if we shorten that to Sim?"

"I never was called Sim," the old man said. "But if that would help you feel at home, I shan't object."

BUCK didn't find the banker hard to talk to. Simmian nodded in quick understanding even when things were worded awkwardly. He didn't seem like a stranger, not with Joe's eyes and Joe's hands. Even wrinkled and stiffened, Buck saw the likeness in the hands.

"You have had some time to think things over since getting my letter," the old man said tipping back in his chair. "Tell me what picture you have in your mind. It's been a long time since I tried to get the viewpoint of a sixteen-year-old lad."

"And two months past," Buck corrected him. "I suppose, Uncle Sim, I'll start by sweeping floors. I guess that's about the worst job around a bank."

"Would you like starting that way?"

"No sir, but it would pay for my keep."

"I'm not interested in your earning your keep—right at first. I'd say you needed some schooling."

Buck's face took up all the slack. "I'm interested in earning my keep. I'm on my own now and paying my way."

"That might not be the best plan—at first."

"Uncle Sim, Joe has supported me for ten years, I've leaned back and let him worry. I earn my way from now on, with you or with someone else."

Simmian Ebberly nodded. "Then you earn it with me." He walked to the door and called to a boy to bring Dave Owen to his office. He turned back to Buck. "I call Dave Owen my outside man.

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My bank takes in all sorts of odd things as security. Horses, cows, pigs, even land. Owen takes care of that end. I believe you would like working with Dave for a while. It would pay better than sweeping floors and you might find it more to your liking."

Buck's eyes lighted. "I can break the raw colts, saddle or harness. I guess this won't be so bad after all."

Simmian Ebberly smiled. "Maybe it won't." He began to pace the floor, for all his age and weight his feet fell lightly. Not as easy as Joe walked, of course; Joe was smooth as satin.

"When I heard of my brother's death, I had a lot of trouble finding his two sons," the old man said. "I got track of you at last through the gun-reputation of Smoky Joe Ebberly." He paused to face Buck. "Your brother has chosen his path; it is already well trodden. He is a notorious gunman."

Buck rose. "Joe's fast all right, but he's never been the type you're thinking of. Joe's not a cold killer."

Old Simmian's face was like stone. "I realize killings are at times forced upon a man. I'm glad to see you do not wear a gun."

Buck's eyes struck back. "My gun is in my saddle pocket. Joe told me not to wear it when I came to see you."

Simmian smiled. "If you were wearing it, I'd still know you were not gunman timber. Your path lies apart from your brother's. Buck, are you willing to forget Joe?"

"No sir!"

Simmian's brows bunched in a frown. "Go on."

"I COULDN'T forget anybody that'd carried my burden for ten years. Not if I tried. And I'm not trying. If you'd see Joe, Uncle Sim, you'd know you were wrong. You remind me of him, the way you're drawing your brows together right now makes me expect a lecture. Joe's tall and a neat traveler like you, and you both have a way of emptying your voice."

Buck stepped close to Simmian Ebberly. "No use of us beating around the bush. You think Joe is headed for Hell—I know he isn't. Nothing will ever make me forget Joe!"

"I don't want to think any man on his way toward Hell," the banker said quietly, "but Joe's gun-reputation proves he is a man who does not observe—er, conventions—"

"Have you always observed conventions, Uncle Sim?"

"Buck, I'm a banker—a— Why did you ask that question?"

"Because you and Joe are so much alike. Eyes, voice, hands—style."

Simmian looked hard at Buck. "Why did you leave Joe to come to me?"

"He thought banking would be good for me."

"Joe thought banking would be good for you, eh? Buck, your lips tighten as you say that. As you said a moment back, there's no use beating around the bush. Did you and Joe quarrel?"

"No sir. I said some things, maybe, but we didn't quarrel. You wouldn't understand because I don't. Joe has never said a word about my being in the wa—I mean about it being time for me to get out on my own. We didn't quarrel, but maybe I saw red for a time. I was for starting out that night, but Joe held me back. Made me wait 'til morning and leave calm, with my hair parted." Buck tried to smile.

"Then Joe made you come? You didn't want to come?"

"I'd rather have stayed with Joe—if he'd wanted me."

Buck suddenly felt his mind was naked before the shrewd eyes of the old

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man. Simmian Ebberly was reading him as Joe so often had.

The tall old man walked around the room, paused to look out the window. "And I had expected a fight with Joe," he said more to himself than to Buck. "I had expected he'd try and keep a hold on you." He turned back to the room. "So Joe looks like me, eh?"

"A lot, Uncle Sim. You don't seem a stranger to me because of your eyes and walk and the way you shift your hands. I guess I could feel at home with you pretty easy, but if you expect me to forget Joe, I'm not staying here."

The old man's brows pulled together. "I've been wrong about Joe in one thing—I thought he'd be trying to bring you along in his tracks. Maybe I'm wrong in other ways. Buck, I'm going to write and ask your brother to come to Lewiston. Will a letter at the same address reach him?"

The light that flashed to Buck's face with the first words, was quickly dashed out. The reward notice swam before his eyes. Where *was* Joe?

"Joe left on a trip," he said huskily. "I can't reach him for a while."

Simmian Ebberly looked hard at his nephew, but he did not press him further. "When you hear from Joe, let me know," he said.

A rap fell on the door.

"That's Dave Owen," the old man said softly to Buck. "Don't let his manner make you uneasy, his mind is so buried in his work he hasn't time to talk. He delivers gold for the bank and brings it in, as well as buying horses and cattle."

DAVE OWEN entered and Buck knew him instantly for a gunman. The badge of his calling rested at his hip, and its silent threat was echoed in his eyes. He moved as a man does who is aware of what goes on behind him as well as before.

"Dave, this is my nephew, Buck Ebberly. Buck, this is Dave Owen."

Owen's face was fleetingly creased in a smile. "A little feller, huh?" he said to Simmian, ignoring Buck. "Don't look much like the stock."

When the banker said Buck was to work with him, Owen was not pleased.

"My work is too dangerous for a kid, especially right now." He looked from lowered lids at the old man. "I was stuck up last week comin' back from Florence, and now it's a cinch Oregon Haines is in these parts."

"We won't send any gold for a few days, Dave," Simmian said.

"Which means we'll have more pilin' up in the bank. That'll suit Haines fine. Better let me take some to Walla Walla—"

Simmian Ebberly shook his head. "It's safer in stone walls. When you ride out to inspect that band of horses today, take Buck with you."

Dave Owen slid Buck a swift glance. "Be at the barn at noon, kid."

Buck nodded. "I'll be there."

When the door had closed on Owen, Simmian Ebberly took up his pacing again. "There's something behind this rumor that Oregon Haines is headed this way. Dave is worried." The old man dropped a hand on Buck's shoulder. "Take things easy, don't grip your lips so tight. Banking isn't just raking in money, it's protecting that money after it's accepted. It's men like Oregon Haines and his gang that makes it needful for me to hire men like Dave Owen. Owen was held up last week on the trail between here and Florence, and relieved of considerable gold. His temper has been horny ever since."

Buck met his uncle's eyes. "I better buckle on my gun," he said. "Joe taught

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me to shoot, even if he did head me off from any fights."

"I'll try and follow Joe's policy," Simmian Ebberly said, "but it might be good to have your gun handy." He reached swiftly to a hip pocket hid under the long tail of his black coat, and brought forth a six-shooter. "The Ebberly bank doesn't surrender its gold without a fight," he said, and his voice was strong with pride.

CHAPTER IV

GHOST FIGHTER

BUCK moved Ringy to Simmian Ebberly's big barn. It was a roomy place with a corral at back where extra horses might be kept. Dave Owen was in charge, with one man to do the actual work about the place. He was cleaning a stall as Buck entered. Buck caught a glance of the long, solemn face as he led Ringy to the back, and a glance was all he needed. He knew the man.

He tied Ringy's halter rope to the manger and walked back.

The man leaned on his fork handle and looked up. He shoved his battered hat back from his damp forehead and smiled. It was Deacon Tanton, an ex-con that had once visited Joe. He held out his hand.

"Howdy, kid, how's Joe?"

"Howdy, Deak. Joe's fine. Been here long?"

"Two months." The voice was deep and solemn as his eyes.

"Seems funny to see you sweating."

"It seems good to sweat, kid. Come over here and let's talk before Owen comes back and prods me up. I've heard the old man's nephew was coming, but I never connected you and Smoky Joe with the banking Ebberlys. I'm glad it's you, kid. He's a fine old man. A lot like Joe, eh?"

"Same blood tracings." Buck was wondering what Deak Tanton was doing pitching manure. The tall, loosely-set up man seemed to read his thought. He wiped his lean jaw with a shapely hand and spoke.

"I'm working, Buck. Not much of a job, forking manure out of a window, but it's honest. The last time I talked to Joe, he said to me, 'Deak, why don't you quit the night-trails and start earning your living by sweat instead of lead?' He was sowing seed on soil I'd been tilling myself ever since I got out of jail. That talk decided me, and you can tell Joe so when you see him."

He laid a slender hand on Buck's arm. "Joe's a damn fine man.

"There's something bothering me, Buck," he went on. "I started here with a clean slate, call myself Hank Jones. Even Dave Owen doesn't know me, but I don't give a curse about fooling Owen. It's the old man. Simmian Ebberly comes around here often, likes horses and for all his years he still sits a good saddle. Every time I saddle for him, I feel lower than a snake's belly. I guess I'll tell him who I am."

Buck looked into the solemn eyes. "Deak Tanton is known for a fancy gunman and several killings," the boy said. "Uncle Simmian is against gunmen with reps."

Deacon Tanton looked surprised. "Hell'sfire, Dave Owen is a gunman with a rep as long as your arm—doesn't the old man know that?"

"You mean Owen is a killer?"

"Buck, I'm buttoning up about Dave Owen. His funeral is his own, mine is something else again. Owen doesn't like me, but I'm not letting him push me to flashing a gun. He would like to know if I'm plain or fancy, but I'm not here to demonstrate my gunwork. I'd take it kindly if you didn't let Owen

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pump you about me. With the old man it's different. I figure he's a square-shooter."

"And you don't think Dave Owen is?"

Tanton picked up his fork and turned back toward the stall he was cleaning. "I didn't say that."

DAVE OWEN came from town and announced he was ready to start for the horse-ranch. He and Buck were soon on their way. The first mile was silent, then Owen spoke.

"I saw you talking to Hank Jones. Know him?"

"Is the tall loose-jointed man's name Jones?"

They rode another mile before Dave Owen spoke again. "You better ask Ebberly to put you in the bank to work for a while. I'm expecting trouble from several angles. I don't want to be bothered with a kid."

Buck said nothing. A rabbit leaped from a sage brush and his hand swooped for his gun. There was a roar and the rabbit dropped, shot through the head. Dave Owen slanted a glance at Buck.

"Smart way of answerin' me, huh?"

Buck's cheeks reddened. "I wasn't trying to show off. I just saw the rabbit and my gun was handy."

"Plumb handy. Who taught you to pull her smokin'?"

Something told Buck not to mention Joe's name to Owen. "The Ebberlys run to a fast hand," he answered.

They arrived at the ranch and Dave Owen went at his job with assurance. He knew horses. Buck watched in silence; learning from Dave Owen would have to be through observation.

It was evening when they rode back into Lewiston. The long shadows should have brought quiet to the town, but they had not. The streets were swirling with life. Dave Owen sank spurs and dashed ahead. Buck kept pace. They thundered into the crowd and dismounted.

There had been a robbery! The Ebberly bank. Oregon Haines and his gang. Tall shooting—four men. Old Bill Hardy held them off. Poor old Bill—he got his. But he didn't go out like a lamb, he was pitching lead to the last.

"When was the robbery?" Owen asked. "Get any of the gang?"

"There's one stiff in the back of the saloon," a dozen shouted.

Buck raced along beside Owen to the saloon, was ahead of him as he entered the back room. He shouldered through the men gathered about a still form on two pine boards. Sweat burst on his forehead in dizzy relief. It wasn't Joe!

Dave Owen looked down on the set face. "One of the gents that robbed me last week," he said. "This wasn't the Haines gang."

As Dave and Buck walked away from the place, Owen asked a question. His words stabbed at the boy as though by their thrusts he hoped to bring an unguarded response. "Why was you in such a hurry to see who that dead bandit was?"

There was a buzz of warning deep inside Buck. He looked into Owen's face studded with glittering eyes. "Why were you?"

Owen's teeth flashed between his drawn lips. "Kid, you're too smart. It ain't gettin' you no place."

"I'm not trying to get any particular place—with you, Owen."

Deacon Tanton had fallen in with them as they neared the barn where the saddle horses were stabled. When the somber-eyed man got a chance he whispered to Buck.

"I'm sorry you talked back to Dave Owen. It won't buy you nothing but

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trouble. Owen's a mean man. Real mean. You watch your step sharp from now on, you hear?"

BUCK rapped on the door of his uncle's office, and the old man bade him enter. Simmian Ebberly's face was older than it had been that morning. His eyes burned in their deep sockets like low fires. Dave Owen was in the room; and he went on talking, taking no note of Buck.

"It ain't the Haines gang. That dead man was one that helped stick me up last week, and Oregon Haines was in Portland then. This is some four-flushin' gang that's sprung up."

"Not such four-flushers," Simmian said dryly. "If Bill Hardy hadn't fought like a lion, they'd have carried off a good sum of gold."

Dave Owen's fleeting smile crossed his lips. "I s'pose you're wantin' me to remember I didn't want you to hire old Bill Hardy."

"You said he was too old, Dave."

"And I still say it! A young man would have been quick enough to have saved himself. Puttin' ol' Bill against a gang of killers was slaughter."

Simmian's lips tightened. "It's hard for you to concede a point."

As Owen was getting ready to leave, Deacon Tanton came in.

"What is it, Jones?" Simmian asked.

"Bill Hardy was killed this evening," the solemn voice began. "Bill and I had been friends for twenty years. I'd like, Mr. Ebberly, to have the place left vacant by Bill's death."

"Want to step up to a better job, eh?" The old man's tones were sharp.

"Yes, and I'll pray the same snakes that killed Bill will come back to get me. Bill was past sixty. Too many winters was frosted into his gun arm. I'm still fast."

Dave Owen leaped on the words. "So, Jones, at last you're admitting you're a gunman. I've known it since the day you first planted a cowhide in this town." His eyes slid back behind still lids. "You never spoke before of bein' friends with Bill Hardy."

"A man's business is his own, Owen. I never expected to strap on a gun again, but Hardy's death has changed the picture. I'm going on the smoke trail once more."

His tones were round and deep. The solemnness of his manner lent dignity to his slow words. "May I have the job, Mr. Ebberly?"

Simmian looked him up and down. "You may, Jones."

"I'm not in favor of turning the watch over to a stranger," Dave Owen put in evenly. "Especially a gunman that has traveled under false colors."

"You were not in favor of turning it over to Bill Hardy, either. And Bill gave his life for the bank."

The old man took a turn about the room, then came to an abrupt halt before Owen and Deacon Tanton. "We must pull together in this thing. Ten years ago this town was in the grip of a murdering gang; life wasn't safe after dark. A few determined men cleaned them out. There have recently been new strikes in the gold country, and Lewiston is menaced again. The inside of the platter must be wiped clean."

Owen's eyes flashed. "You mean a vigilance committee?" The words exploded in the stillness.

"The day of the vigilante has passed. We have power in the law now. Sheriff Curt Lowe will beat this thing if we all get behind him. These gangs must be wiped out!"

Simmian Ebberly stood tall and straight, his eyes flinging out a challenge that chilled Buck's heart. Deacon

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Tanton nodded his head gravely. With a shrug, Dave Owen reached for the makings and rolled himself a smoke.

When the two men had left, Buck looked at his uncle.

"What do you know about Dave Owen before he came to Lewiston?" he asked.

Simmian's heavy brows lifted. "Nothing."

Buck persisted: "Don't you usually investigate the men that pack your gold?"

The old man laughed. "So you're suspicious of Dave Owen. Get that out of your head, Buck. Dave's been with me five years. He loses a pot once in a while, such as this last when five men jumped him; but Dave Owen has proved to be far safer than Wells Fargo. He goes and comes like a ghost. But when he's tackled, there's nothing ghostlike about his fighting. That's all I need to know. He's just a lone wolf by instinct."

"A man usually has a reason for not running with the pack," Buck replied.

Simmian shook his head. "Forget it, Buck. Put your mind on wiping out this Oregon Haines gang."

CHAPTER V

AND ONE IS A LIAR

BUCK did not see Deacon Tanton until the next evening. The sheriff had come back empty-handed from trailing the bank robbers. Tanton stopped Buck on the street to speak of it. They walked on to a quiet spot where they could talk unobserved. Buck's mind jumped to an incident that had been bothering him since he had talked that morning to Dave Owen.

"Owen is keen as a wolf, Deak. I hesitated a fraction of a second in calling you Jones this morning, and his eyes whetted. I'm not sure he noticed, but I'm afraid he did. Maybe you better tell Uncle Sim who you are so we'll be in the clear if Owen runs you down."

"I've been thinking of that," the Deacon said, but he shook his head. "With Owen warning the old man against me, I'd be fired off the watch job. And, Buck, I want that job. Those robbers are coming back and I want to be waiting for them with lead. Kid, Bill Hardy was the man that got me out of jail. I owe it to him to square up against these killers."

Before Buck could answer, Tanton was speaking again.

"Dave Owen lied when he said that dead man wasn't one of the Haines gang. When I heard that shooting at the bank last night, I ran for my gun. I was too late to help old Bill, but I saw a man streaking away and it was Oregon Haines. Why did Owen lie? Why does he want to throw the sheriff off the trail of Oregon Haines?"

Buck's breath was hot against his teeth. "Did—did you see anybody else beside Haines? Anybody you knew?"

Deacon Tanton was pouring the full force of his grave eyes against Buck's face. "I'm not sure," he said softly. "Not sure. Kid, Joe couldn't be in the country, could he?"

Buck stiffened against the mournful eyes. "No. No, Joe is in Oregon."

Deacon Tanton seemed satisfied. "I caught a glimpse of a man on a gray horse," he said half in musing. "Something familiar about him, but it was only a glimpse. I could be dead wrong." He leaned close. "There's something else. That gang know me. Of course Oregon Haines would spot me right off if he came within gunshot, but he didn't. That other fellow I mentioned, looked back. Maybe he knew me and slipped word to the gang."

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"There's lots of fellows would know you, Deak," Buck said.

Deacon nodded. "Plenty of them," he acknowledged.

"How do you know they've spotted you?" Buck asked.

Deacon Tanton looked around to make sure they were alone. "Because they hit me today to join up with them. I'm telling you this, Buck, for I know I can trust you. You're blood kin to old Simmian Ebberly, and you'd fight for him if need be."

"Yes," Buck said. "I'll fight for the Ebberly bank."

"Uh-huh, you don't have to tell me that. Joe is the man we need, old Smoky Joe. He'd make things curl around here."

"But Joe isn't here. What were you going to say, Deak?"

Deacon Tanton told how a man had approached him with an offer to join the gang in an even split on the Ebberly Bank gold.

"I didn't go churchy and tell them I was collecting for the death of Bill Hardy. They'd have laughed me down. They think I'm in on big pay stuff. They think I'm in at the bank so's to rob the place. They felt safe talking to me, Deacon Tanton.

"When I turned them down, they said they'd get me out of the way the same as they did Bill Hardy. They gave me until to-night to change my mind. They're meeting at a miner's shack up the Clearwater ten miles to plan the robbery. They said for me to be there at ten o'clock if I wanted to come in with them."

Buck whispered. "Where's the shack, Deak?"

Deak smiled sadly. "I thought of spying too, kid, but there's two arguments against it. First I don't dare leave my job at the bank. Second, they're going to be on the lookout for me, and they're a tough bunch. Of course, I could go and pretend to be in with them and then spill things to Ebberly, but I can't stomach the play, kid. I'm a dim-trailer to them, and they're offering to split fair. I'd shoot them down with pleasure in a fair fight, but I can't deal from the bottome of the deck."

"But I could go!"

"I knew you'd offer, Buck, that's why I told you all this. But you must promise me this, not to go alone. Joe would hunt me down and carve me limb from limb if I sent you against the Oregon Haines bunch alone. Take Simmian Ebberly with you—and Dave Owen."

"Owen? You hinted he was in with Haines."

"And I think he is, but tonight we'll find out for sure. If Owen is honest, he'll play a lively tune for Haines to dance to. Good or bad, Dave Owen is a tough customer. If he's in with Haines, he'll make an excuse to stay in Lewiston, at least 'til he slips the gang word. It'll be your job to see he doesn't get a chance to warn Oregon Haines."

HE WAS the old Deak Tanton as he went into the plans for the night. His rich, whispery tones were cold as steel. Long years on the dim trails had chiseled a hardness into him that no reformation could obliterate. His face was pale as alabaster.

Buck listened, chilled to the bone. Beneath the threshold of his awareness, half-forgotten teachings were knocking at his brain. They pushed open a tiny door and paraded into his memory.

And he heard Joe talking, as if the words were brought to his ears by a wind that swept from a far place:

"You're better to trust a man that sweats a little while he talks, Bucky. Watch the fellow with a marble face,

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the man with hate frozen in his veins.

"You can go to Simmian Ebberly and tell him you overheard men planning to meet at the old Crow Creek shack tonight," Deacon Tanton said. "My name will have to be kept out of it. Dave Owen would brand me a liar. But he won't dare lift his voice too strong against you."

"I'll do it," Buck said quietly.

"I knew you would, kid," Deacon Tanton whispered. "If Dave Owen refuses flatfooted to go, Simmian Ebberly will smell a might big rat. The old man has fire yet, don't forget that! Take care of yourself, Buck. If Owen isn't with you, don't jump the three men that will be in the shack. Listen to their plans and slip the word to me. I'll handle things from there on."

Buck left Deacon Tanton and walked about town for a while before he went to his uncle's home.

There were to be three men at that cabin on Crow Creek, Oregon Haines and Lanky Monroe and another stranger. Just those three. Lanky was joining up with Haines, Tanton said. If Dave Owen was out to get Oregon Haines, tonight would be his time. And if Haines was wiped out, Joe would probably look up his kid brother to see how things were going.

One fear kept shooting through Buck. What if Deacon Tanton had been mistaken about the men who were to be at that meeting? What if Joe should be there?

Buck found his uncle and Dave Owen in a back room of the Ebberly home, the room Simmian called his library. Buck wasted no time in getting to the point, and the old man began to pace as the boy talked.

Owen listened with his swift smile going and coming. It cut across his lips like a shadow. Buck finished and stood by the solid oak table, the light cut away from his eyes by his hat brim.

"We have about time to get to this shack by ten o'clock," Simmian said, looking at a large gold watch. Buck was glad he didn't have to ask the old man to come on the trip.

Dave Owen rose and nailed Buck with his hard eyes. "Kid, you're lyin'!"

The words cracked and Simmian's feet ceased their pacing. He turned a stormy face to Owen. "Your fool snap-judgment will get you into a bad jam some day, Dave."

"This boy is pullin' the wool over your eyes. He hasn't given me a straight answer to a single question I've asked him. Tonight he was in a huddle with Jones. I watched them for twenty minutes. Couldn't get close enough to hear.

"Now he says he heard this meeting planned. It's something him and Jones has cooked up. Simmian, it's my belief this kid knows Jones and that they're plottin' together. Today he held up long enough on Jones' name to make me suspicious."

Buck walked toward Dave Owen. "Are you afraid of me, Owen?"

Owen's lips slid away from his teeth. "You're just a sucklin' but I ain't forgettin' you got a brother with a gun rep that rattles eyeteeth from here to Hell. Where is Smoky Joe now?"

"I don't know," Buck answered.

Dave Owen laughed. "Ain't got the faintest idea, huh? Well, kid, I figure you're here to look things over for Smoky Joe. Nice little game you and him has hatched up, and Jones is playin' it with you." He took a swift step toward the door. "I'll fetch Hank Jones here and see what *he* says."

BUCK beat him to the door and placed his back against it. "I thought you might try to sneak away and send word

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to Oregon Haines that we were onto him! Haven't you heard, Owen, that a thief always calls thief? You've called it too loud. You've given yourself away."

Simmian Ebberly had been hanging on the edge of things like a panther set for a leap. His eyes were gleaming, his voice whetted to a fine edge. "I'll run this show from here on!"

He thrust Buck from the door and called to his houseboy. "Bring Sheriff Lowe!"

He closed the door and faced the two. "Each of you has charged the other with being a thief," he said. "We will ride to that shack and see who is bluffing."

Owen's face set to stillness. "Don't be a fool, Simmian," he said.

"Don't protest too loudly, Dave," the old man answered.

"This boy is tricking you! If we ride to that shack tonight, we'll be playing into his hand—his and Jones'!"

"This boy is blood kin. He'd hardly be plotting to steal money that soon will be his."

After that they waited for Sheriff Curt Lowe. The officer came with rapid strides and Simmian Ebberly held open the door for him. He was of medium build, grayed and toughened by the years. His eyes and movements were young, but his face was almost old.

Simmian Ebberly told him what was up, and while the old man talked, Sheriff Lowe watched Buck more closely than he did Dave Owen.

When Simmian had finished, Sheriff Lowe asked them all to sit.

"If we're going to that shack by ten, we better be leaving," Buck urged.

"We're goin'," the sheriff said "We'll be there at ten."

"You mean you're fallin' for this kid's lie!" Owen snapped.

"Is there any harm in ridin' to that shack, Dave?"

Dave Owen moved his gun gently to place. "No hurt, Sheriff—if it ain't a trap. Howsomever, you're the law. I'm steppin' across the way a minute, meet you at the foot of Main Street."

"We'll all keep together, Dave," Sheriff Lowe said.

Owen smiled his ghostly smile. "Come along if you want, Sheriff."

Sheriff Lowe shook his head. "You can tend to that business when we get back, Dave. This boy has made a charge against you, you've made one against him. I'm watchin' you both."

They rode by the bank as they left town. Deacon Tanton was sweeping up. Old Bill Hardy had kept the floors clean as well as stood guard.

"There's the gent you should be watchin', Sheriff," Dave Owen said.

CHAPTER VI

LEAD FLIES AT NIGHT

DAVE OWEN rode in stony silence. Sheriff Lowe and Simmian Ebberly spoke briefly and not often. The lack of talk began to eat into Buck's nerves. Ringy began to pound out queer things with his hoofs. They seemed to say, "What if Joe is here? What if you are bringing the law down on Joe?"

Buck knew he must wash such thoughts away before they established a groove. He couldn't go on listening to ghostly words that bathed him in cold sweat. His hand shook when he felt for his gun. He was not afraid for himself; he was afraid for Joe.

The shack was in a wide valley, lumped against three sides. No light was visible. Sheriff Lowe ordered the horses carefully hidden. Dave Owen laughed scornfully. There was utter silence as they crept forward.

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No saddle leather creaked in the shadows of those three trees. They advanced as cautiously as though the enemy had been sighted. Simmian Ebberly was in the lead, then Buck, then Owen. Sheriff Lowe was the last man, and Buck felt the power of a ready gun in his hand. The lawman was determined that no alarm should be given.

It was a night that drew emptiness down from the sky. The lumpy old shack was like a tomb of the long dead. The atmosphere of waiting choked Buck. He had never leaned into the thick of things before. He was shaking, but his gun was in his hand.

They paused at a window that lacked a glass. A dank smell greeted them. It was a room that had known no life for months. Rains had beaten in and molded the boards.

Dave Owen cursed softly. "When are you goin' to stop this show, Sheriff?" he whispered.

His whisper dimmed to nothing. Sheriff Lowe walked to the door and lifted the latch. The hinges creaked.

That was all.

"Empty as the grave on Judgment Day!" the lawman said. "Something sure has missed fire."

"Has it?" Owen snapped.

The four of them waited for an hour. Then they knew there would be no meeting.

"Someone might have realized you had overheard their plans," Simmian said to Buck.

Sheriff Lowe grunted. "Tomorrow you can point out the gents you heard talkin'."

Dave Owen cursed.

Sheriff Lowe kept to a fast pace on the return trip. Simmian rode beside Buck and he tried several times to rouse the boy from his grim silence.

"They spotted you listening and changed plans," he argued. "These dim-trail fellows are foxes."

They rode down the Clearwater Valley at a trot and came to the head of Main Street. It was still some distance to the town's lights.

"I don't hear no fiddles," Sheriff Lowe said. "No dancin'."

He spurred to a gallop. As he crossed the line of darkness to light, a man leaped at him.

"Judas! Where you bin, Sheriff?"

AT THE cry, the town seemed to wrap about them. It seemed to Buck men rose out of the earth to push in among their horses. They were all shouting.

"Bank was robbed! Cleaned out!"

"The night watchman let them in!"

Other cries rose from splitting throats, too many for Buck to hear. The two deputies had taken a posse and given chase. Buck heard it all dimly, then suddenly the voice of Dave Owen cut through with edged clearness.

"Grab the kid! He's workin' with this gang! Him and Jones!"

Buck saw Sheriff Lowe whip his horse about, yelling for the crowd to clear. Hands were swooping for guns. Buck's hand swept downward, and came up spouting a stream of flame. He acted on the instinct of a trapped animal, and fought without a second's reasoning.

He sank spurs into Ringy and split through the crowd to shadows. Simmian Ebberly's voice had rolled out at him, but he had no time to listen. He was slicked down to Ringy's side and his gun was kicking.

This was his first gun fight. He was shooting high and wide and aimlessly, just pitching lead at the howling pack on his heels. He had blasted his way past Owen and the sheriff. The crowd had melted back into pits of blackness.

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Sheriff Lowe was driving at him from an angle, roaring at him to surrender.

Buck's hand steadied. He placed his next shot. The sheriff's horse reared and plunged to the earth. Buck threw Ringy at a black-throated alley and squeezed the trigger again. The hammer fell on dead ground. He shoved the pearl-handled gun into its holster and dug for the rifle on his saddle.

The wolves were pouring into the alley now, in full cry. Men had leaped to saddled horses at tie racks and were in pursuit. A bullet tore through Buck's shoulder, making him sway in the saddle. He had his rifle free but could not use it with one hand.

The mob was thundering at his heels.

Down a side street came a single horseman. He swept into the alley and his rifle poured a red streak at the howling mob. Bullets bit into the mass in a sizzling rain. Horses plunged and squealed, men cursed. Confusion burst. This was not an organized band of men, this was the dregs of the saloons who had risen to bring down a sixteen-year-old boy.

Now they found themselves facing a fighting demon. They immediately took measures to correct such an unpleasing circumstance. Yelping, they fled. The curses of Dave Owen and Sheriff Lowe couldn't check their exodus from the alley. Their rash haste did more than block the advance of the law; it all but rode it down. Lead whipped at their tails and kept up their momentum.

The single horseman swept down the alley to join Buck. The boy was painfully managing to work the rifle he was resting on the saddle horn.

"Sink in your diggers and get out of here!" the man shouted.

"Joe!"

"Make that coyote run, Buck. Fan it!"

BUCK swung Ringy about and sent him forward in a long leap. The horse did not need to be urged. He folded and unfolded his long legs with a speed that melted each movement into the next. Ringy wasn't long on looks, but speed lay in his iron muscles.

"We'll make it!" Buck half-sobbed into the horse's ear. "Joe will fetch us through!"

Joe drew alongside and led off through the brush to a side canyon. The sheriff and Dave Owen had been slowed, perhaps completely confused by the stampede of their ragtail posse from the alley. Joe slowed the pace and kept to a soft carpet of sand that deadened sound.

They came to higher ground and headed east for rougher country.

At a creek, Joe stopped to dress Buck's wound. His tones were brittle as he talked. "How do you feel?" he asked.

"Fine. I can make it out of the country, Joe."

"We're not leaving the country," Joe replied. "Tell me what has happened. Come clean on it all. How come you to join Deak Tanton's gang?"

"Deak's gang! Wasn't it Oregon Haines?"

"It was Deak's. He was working in Lewiston to get the lowdown on the Ebberly Bank. Buck, I guess I made a mistake to send you off alone, but I wanted you to amount to something. I couldn't sleep nights for thinking you might break out into a gunman. Once you get the brand, Buck, it sticks. I wanted you to be a banker. I thought I was doing right to send you to Uncle Simmian."

Buck forget the pain in his shoulder, his blood began to sing through his veins. "Darn your skin, Joe!" he cried. "You took me in neat as a fiddle. I thought you didn't want me sticking

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around any longer. You were always a lot smarter than I, Joe. You'd never have been taken in by Deak Tanton like I was."

"Tell me about Deak," Joe ordered. When I saw he was on a job in the Ebberly Bank, I told him to move on. He said you were working with him and had just angled the sheriff and Dave Owen out of town. I knew he was lying, Buck, but I couldn't put my finger on the play."

Buck told him the entire story.

"Deak must have seen you, Joe," he finished, "for he asked if I was sure you were in Oregon."

"He didn't see me, not 'til I jumped him at the bank. He was just trying to find out if I *was* around. He didn't want me spoiling his plans."

"Joe," Buck said thoughtfully, "I should have known you wouldn't join a gang that robs banks. Why are you here?"

Joe laughed. "Just dropped up to make sure you were getting along with Uncle Simmian. I didn't have anything else to do—the house was pretty vacant without you, Bucky."

It was beginning to get light. Joe pulled down his hat and walked over to tighten his cinch. "You stay here, Buck," he said. "I'm going after Deak Tanton. I'm going to fetch him back alive."

"*Alive!* Joe, he's a snake that's better off dead!"

"But dead snakes can't talk."

Buck was on his feet. "I'm going with you, Joe. I'm not a blubbering kid. I'm getting on toward being a man. We'll bring Deak and make him talk, then we'll amble back home. Yes, we will. Turning me into a banker was your idea but it won't work. I'm not smart like you and Uncle Sim. And don't try to hatch up another trick, because I'll be onto it. You can't knock me down with the same brick twice. I can't use my rifle, but I can work my six-gun."

Joe's eyes gleamed as he looked at his brother.

"Bucky, danged if you haven't grown up."

CHAPTER VII

SHOWDOWN SHACK

HE HELPED the boy to the saddle and they struck for rough country. Joe had got the location of the hangout from Lanky Monroe. Deak Tanton would probably stop there, since several of his men were hurt. The two deputies had given a good account of themselves.

It was noon when they came to a sight of the cabin. They had tied their horses in a brush patch and crawled forward through the sage. Smoke was curling from the chimney.

"There was five stuck up the bank," Joe whispered. "One was killed in Lewiston. That leaves four." He was looking steadily at his brother.

Buck grinned. "Four, that's about the right number for a good fight."

Pride and worry were both mirrored in Joe's eyes. "You crawl up to the back of the cabin, Bucky," he said. "I'll watch 'til you're located, then sneak up through the brush to the door. Remember, we're taking Deak alive."

Buck crawled through the brush toward the back of the cabin. His shoulder throbbed and his head felt light from lack of sleep and the heat pouring into the valley. But he was not trembling. He looked at the gun in his hand and smiled to see it hold like a rock.

He crouched beneath a glassless window waiting for Joe to start the music. He could see into the room through a spot where the chinking between the logs had fallen away.

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Four men were inside. A fire burned in a half-tumbled down fireplace and a pot of coffee boiled on the coals. Deak Tanton was holding a skillet of bacon. His long face was solemn as he looked toward a groaning man in the corner.

"Shut up your croaking, Skeets!" he ordered. "What's a bullet through you compared to your share of that gold we got?"

"Drop that bacon and get your hands up, Deak!"

Joe's hollow voice killed every other sound in the room. Buck lifted to the window and shoved his gun through. "Yeah, higher than a tree!"

Deak Tanton flung the skillet down and was standing empty-handed. His three men leaped to their feet, and froze.

"Nobody will get killed if you follow orders," Joe said. "You with the wounded chest, start shedding your harness. Move fast."

"Nobody drops any guns!" Deacon Tanton's rich voice had thinned. "This is Smoky Joe Ebberly, boys, and he'll shoot us to pieces by inches for what we did to his kid brother. Spread out and fight!"

"Fight and you'll all die," Joe said evenly. "You're the only man I really want, Deak. I'm taking you back to Lewiston."

Tanton's toes were digging into the dirt of the floor, bracing his body against a quick move. Buck leaned an inch farther into the room to be ready when the cyclone hit. Too late he caught a whisper of sound at his back. A laugh curled about his ears and a gun dug into his ribs.

"Drop that smoke-iron, kid!" a voice behind him ordered.

Deacon Tanton laughed softly. "How do you like that, Joe?" he asked. "We had a fifth man here with the horses. He's got a gun buried into the middle of that kid brother of yours." He half turned his head and spoke to the man behind Buck. "Hold that lead-thrower on a vital spot, Mason. Blow the kid to kingdom come if he moves."

BUCK took time to let the first chill pass, then he answered Tanton. "I'm going to move, and when I do these two men under my gun will go down. Joe will get you, Deak. Too bad you won't be present to bury your men with one of your sermons. Maybe one about how you'd die for a friend—like old Bill Hardy!"

Deacon Tanton swore. He cursed a kid too dumb to swerve an inch from his own funeral. "Get ready, boys," he said. "I'm not afraid of any man that walks, but I'm not exactly relishing this go with Smoky Joe Ebberly."

Still Tanton didn't move to make battle. "Maybe," he said, "these gents would like to compromise."

He looked to Joe. "How do you like having that cannon resting against that kid's liver?You were always touchy about the boy, Joe. Want to make a peace talk?"

Joe said, "You dirty—"

"We're doing our talking with bullets," Buck struck in. "No use for you to waste good breath, Deak. Open the pot, Joe!"

Buck flicked his brother a single glance. Joe was swinging on his toes toward the window. His first bullet was not going to be for Deak Tanton. He was going to drop that man pushing his gun into Buck's ribs.

"Joe!" Buck yelled. To give Tanton that much time would mean Deak's gun would be roaring before Joe's second shot. But his cry was lost in a crash. Buck leaped and kicked backward. The whole world seemed to explode. Fire streaked through his side.

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He leaned against the wall and shot through the window into the seething room. His brain was functioning icily. Only one thought was in his mind, to shoot quick and straight. To hold up his end of the fight. Deacon Taunton's gun had spit forth a single stream of flame, then had dropped into a well of silence. Other guns were carrying on the death battle. Joe was weaving and firing.

Then it all sank away into a dim, smoke-filled stillness. Buck wasn't sure of anything except that Joe was still on his feet. The kid looked behind him to see what had happened to the man that had threatened him.

He was stretched across a rock. Joe's bullet had caught him in the heart.

Buck looked back into the room and located the long body of Deacon Tanton. It looked as though Joe had had to kill him. That man at the window had upset Joe's plan for careful shooting. But Deak had left his mark on Joe. Buck couldn't see clearly, but he knew Joe was clutching the wall and asking in a far-away voice how bad he was hurt.

Seeing Joe that way, forced some of the clouds back from Buck's mind. He had heard of men who died on their feet. Joe's face was ghastly, his shirt was blood-soaked.

"Sit down!" he cried. "I'm not hurt, Joe—sit down!"

He felt along the wall of the cabin, trying to make his way around to the door. It was a long way, rocks rose up under his feet and brush hit him in the face. Queerest of all, voices began to ring in his ears. That shouldn't be. He had emptied his gun into that room. All the men had been lying in a terrible silence when he had left the window. There shouldn't be voices now.

But there were . . .

Buck made it around the cabin and to the door. The room was full of men. Sheriff Lowe and Dave Owen and Simmain Ebberly. Joe was sagging against the wall, still hanging to his gun.

"I DIDN'T mean to kill Deak Tanton," Joe repeated, looking at the still form on the dirt floor of the cabin. "I aimed to take him alive, but they got the drop on Buck and I had to kill him to save myself." Joe lifted his sagging head and looked at Simmian Ebberly. "I wanted to bring Tanton back to Lewiston and make him talk. He tricked the kid."

"Yeah."

The sheriff looked up from examining Deacon Tanton. "He's deader than a hammer. He's done his last talkin'! So you're Smoky Joe Ebberly, huh? Thought the kid said you was in Oregon."

Joe looked at him, fighting to stay on his feet and to still hold to his gun. "Buck didn't know I was in Lewiston. I trailed along to be sure he was making it, but I didn't get here in time." The gun fell from his fingers and he began to sink to the floor.

"Joe!"

Dave Owen caught him and lowered his limp body. Buck strained to be free of hands that had caught him as he came through the door, but Simmian Ebberly pushed him back.

"They'll take care of Joe," he said. "It'll be easier to put a dressing on while he's not feeling pain." He looked across at the still form. "So that's Joe?"

"Yes, and if he'da got here sooner, Deak Tanton would never have pulled that bank job. He fooled me, but he couldn't have fooled Joe!"

Jerkily Buck told the story. Sheriff Lowe had dug beneath a pile of bedding and produced the gold stolen from

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the bank. One of the thieves opened his eyes when whiskey was poured between his teeth, and smiled grimly.

"Deak Tanton figured he could outthink anybody on earth," he said. "I told him he was twistin' the Devil's tail when he put up a job on the kid brother of Smoky Joe Ebberly. Hell, I told him Joe would swarm all over us!"

At last Joe opened his eyes. He looked around the group until his eyes rested on the aged face of Simmian Ebberly. He forced his voice to carry across to the old man.

"You should have known that kid wasn't a thief!" Fire flamed even in his weakness.

"I never said he was a thief," Simmian Ebberly answered quietly. "I tried to call the young firebrand back when he burst away there in Lewiston, but it was like tossing words into a cyclone. I wasn't fooled in him or Dave Owen; it was Deacon Tanton that had the wool pulled over my eyes."

"I tried to tell you," snapped Dave Owen.

Simmian Ebberly looked at him wearily. "And I'm safe in saying you'll always remember you tried to tell me." He spoke again to Joe. "I was going to write you, young man, but Buck wasn't certain of your address. I was going to ask you come to Lewiston to live. Now that you are here, I'll try to see that you stay."

Joe's dark eyes glowed. "I'd like it," he said in a hollow voice, "but I'm hardly a man you'd care to take into your business." He smiled without a trace of feeling. "I'm a gunman."

"I hope you turn out as good a banker as gunman," Simmian Ebberly shot back. "I do want you. Buck isn't going to be worth his salt in a bank, but he'll be a good outside man."

Joe's face suddenly lost its calm. He gripped his lips to stay their trembling. "I'd like to come, Uncle Simmian," he said.

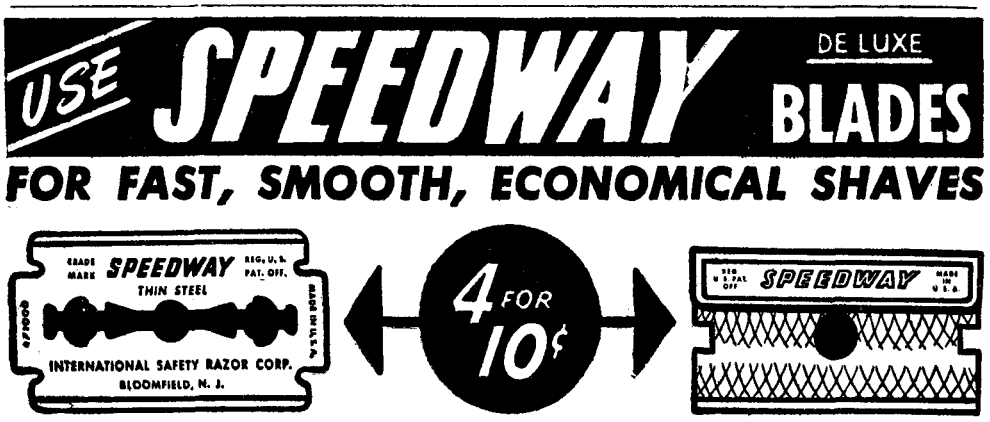
Simmian Ebberly looked from Buck to Joe. "I've felt my hands losing their grip for some time, I've realized my brain had lost some of its keenness. It's worried me when I'd wake up at night. Now I can smoke my pipe and read in peace. There'll be young hands and minds at the helm."

Dave Owen edged forward and looked at Joe.

He smiled, just a little.

"So you're Smoky Joe. I ain't never met you, but I'm pleased to. I'm mortal glad you're goin' to be around to keep that kid in line. He's plumb too many for me and Simmian."

THE END



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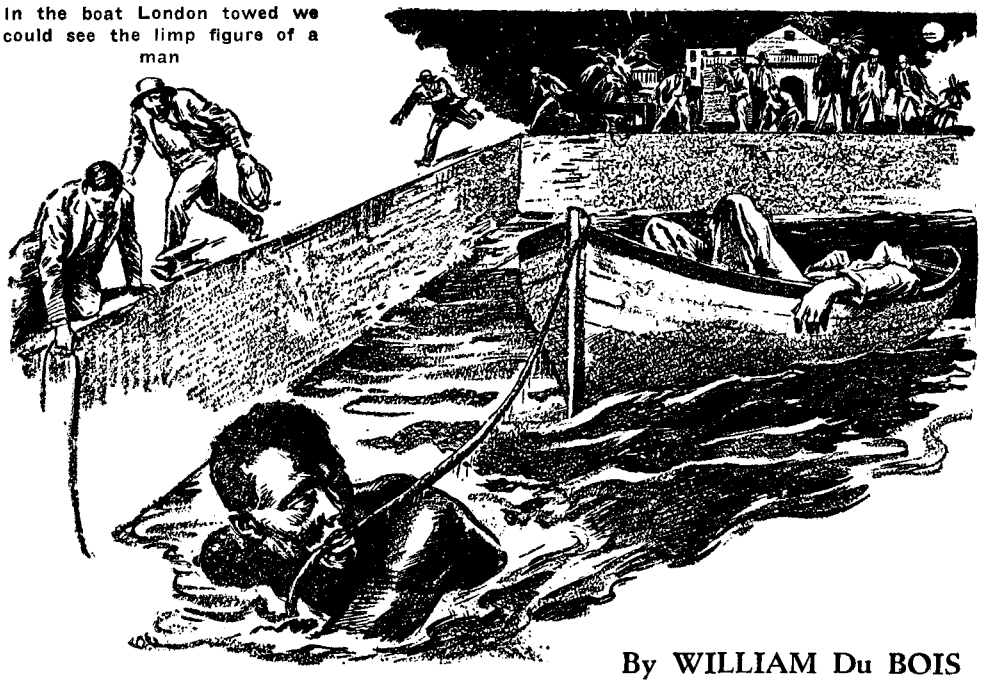
Death Under Water



In the boat London towed we could see the limp figure of a man

By WILLIAM Du BOIS

I'M JACK JORDAN, a newspaper man; I've played detective before, but I never expected to tackle a mystery on a lonely cay in the Bahama Banks. It was the result of my joining the party headed by

TONY YATES, millionaire and aging playboy. Tony had just financed the construction of a magnificent deep-sea aquarium on Yates Cay; and we were all going out there with

DR. HUBERTUS ULRICH, the great ichythologist, who was to take permanent charge of the aquarium. I got in on this because I was an old friend of DAVE YATES, Tony's brother and press agent. Dave was deeply in love with

ELSA ULRICH, the doctor's daughter; and what had brought me south was a curious mystery involving Elsa. I'd recently covered a Greenwich Village murder and in the studio where the body was discovered I'd recognized a certain painting to be the work of Elsa Ulrich. Well, Dave Yates had a rather feeble explanation for that, so I dropped the subject.

THEN, while we were preparing to set out from Bermuda for Yates Cay, one of our party was killed. The body of ZOO-BUG STRONG, Ulrich's assistant, was found on a beach. My suspicion that Zoo-bug hadn't died by accident was strengthened when I learned that he, for some inexplicable reason, had been masquerading as an artist in Greenwich Village. The studio where the dead man—one Adam Foster—had been found, where I'd seen Elsa's painting, had belonged to Zoo-bug.

There were plenty of complications when we finally arrived at that coral reef called Yates Cay. Tony Yates was drinking like a fish, and his wife Gail, in spite of her aristocratic poise, could not conceal how difficult this was for her. Dave Yates couldn't make Elsa Ulrich consent to marry him, and to add further confusion, a young aquarium assistant named FRANK HARDY was obviously and violently in love with Elsa. Then we had our second tragedy.

That first night a cry brought us all run-

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ning to the barracuda tank—to find there the mangled body of Tony Yates. This time there could be no question of accidental death; Tony had been stabbed before he was pushed into the tank.

WELL, I'm not smart enough to stay clear of a murder mystery, and so I set to work. The first startling information I unearthed involved two of the party whom I have not mentioned so far—DR. KARL VON MERZ, the zoologist, and that front-page adventurer, ALEC NASH.

Before his death Tony Yates had told me that von Merz was to be Ulrich's assistant, that von Merz was to be given charge of the Yates Cay Aquarium when the older scientist died. Ulrich did not know this, but Alec Nash did.

And Alec proceeded to make the amazing statement that von Merz was endeavoring to get immediate control of the cay—so that he might turn it over to the Third Reich for a naval base. . . .

CHAPTER XX

DR. CHIMPANZEE

AS I LOOK back on that moment, I think that my self-control was remarkable. Surely it was all of twenty seconds before I jumped for his throat, and slammed him bolt upright in a chair.

"So this is my reward—letting you waste my time—"

"I don't blame you for being angry, Jack. I was rather heated myself, when I first checked on the possibility, and found that it was definite."

"So you've the nerve to sit there and insist that the doc is on the Nazi payroll?"

"He was a party man, long before the *Anschluss*," said Nash, calmly. "Since then, he has been discreet—and very active."

"Why has this never found its way into print?"

"Don't be childish, Jack. Surely you recall the time he just escaped arrest for taking those pictures in Panama."

"You mean, the time he stopped off to recondition one of his boats, on the way to Cocos?"

"Yes, Jack. I know that the press called it a scientific expedition. It's as good a camouflage as any."

I subsided warily. "And now he's selling them a sub base. Isn't that a long leap in the dark, even for a chimpanzee?"

"It's self-evident, from what I've just said. This cay is in a natural blue hole, with a well-marked channel dynamited to deep water. It's less than a day's cruise to the Bahama Passage. Little more than overnight from Miami."

"Is this what you wanted to tell the Nassau police tomorrow?"

"This is what I *shall* tell them, Jack."

"All right, Alec. Let's see if I follow your dog-leg argument. You say von Merz was determined to take over here—which would have involved doing away with old Ulrich. You insist that Elsa has thwarted him by drowning Strong, his accomplice, and dirking Tony before Tony can put his signature to the transfer. Where's your proof?"

I was watching him narrowly now. For the second time in ten minutes, his eyes were the first to drop.

"Be honest with me, Nash. Admit you've brought a very pretty theory down here from New York—and not a thing besides. Admit that your theory has just been knocked cockeyed."

"You asked me for my story, Jack."

"And you feed me a purple passage. Let's assume von Merz is carrying one of Hitler's union cards, after all. You're still up a tree to prove any commitment where this out-island is concerned.

"Suppose Strong was in von Merz's confidence. Suppose Elsa did resent Strong's influence with her father. Surely she could have found some less drastic way of scotching him.

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"Or let's go the whole hog, and admit she *did* drown Zoo-bug—for some motive you never even thought of. You can't pin Tony's death on her for the reasons stated. If Elsa knew that the Austrian was a German agent, she'd have gone straight to Tony and—"

"Not if she had her wits about her. Do you know how much Yates had invested in Berlin when—"

"Answer one question frankly, Alec. Is this island big enough to hold more than one amatuer sleuth?"

Nash got up, looking hurt. "Don't worry, Jack. I wouldn't take your job for a gift."

He couldn't have picked a better exit than that, either. I sat quietly after he had gone, adding and subtracting. When I'd convinced myself that I had a problem in algebra, I went to the door and called in the next witness.

ELSA ULRICH'S hair was still dripping when she sat down in the broken-back armchair. So there was no real need for me to touch her shoulder, as far as the record was concerned. I patted it reassuringly, just the same.

"Would you like something to put on over that bathing suit, Miss Ulrich?"

"Thank you, I'm not a bit uncomfortable."

"Do you often swim after dark?"

"Frequently. Why?"

"The police will make a lot of this later on," I said. "Don't blame me for raising the point now. Were you in that lagoon when you heard the scream?"

"Yes, I'd dived in from the sandspit some twenty minutes before. Of course, I swam back at once and ran up the beach with Dave."

"Did this aquatic exercise take place after your meeting under the coco palms?"

Elsa smiled thinly. "Immediately afterward. I see you've questioned Frank pretty thoroughly, Mr. Jordan."

"Please call me Jack. We've got to be friends, if it kills us. And don't be too hard on the University of Miami. Calf-love can be very devastating at times. You must have known he'd spy on you tonight."

"Very well, Jack. Would you like a complete list of my activities since dinner? When my last guest left the terrace, I saw father to his armchair, and found him his place in Spengler.

"Then I went down to meet Dave. To explain all over again why I couldn't marry him. When we heard Frank coming, I used it as an excuse to break away. You see, Dave was taking things rather badly."

"I can see perfectly."

"That way, I had a better chance of keeping clear. I knew he'd be on my heels with more arguments."

"Much obliged for the frankness. I'll now return the compliment, Miss Ulrich."

"Call me Elsa, if it'll make you any happier."

"All right, Elsa. It's a dramatic story, but how many people will believe it?"

"Do you?"

"Of course I do. Unfortunately, not everyone has my gift for looking at things simply."

"And just what does that mean?"

"Only that you'll almost surely be accused of murder tomorrow—unless we think fast tonight."

"Just because I was swimming alone, a few minutes before Mr. Yates' death?"

I took my time on the next one. "This isn't cricket, of course, but . . . did you know that Strong was posing as an artist, back in New York?"

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SHE took the change of attack in her stride. "You needn't go into that, Jack. Dave showed me the New York papers this evening."

"Had you heard of Adam Foster before?"

"Never."

"And no idea why Strong should pretend to be a painter?"

"None."

"Can you explain how one of your canvases found its way to his easel?"

"I suppose you're referring to *After the Storm*. I gave that picture to Alfred some time ago."

"But Dave said—"

"Yes, I know. Something touching about buying up my daubs for posterity. It was very sweet of him, too. But *After the Storm* was never up for sale. Not even at the exhibit. Alfred had asked for it at the varnishing. Of course, I was both surprised and pleased—"

"Thanks again, Elsa. I suppose you're aware that Adam Foster's death in 12th Street—Strong's drowning in Bermuda—and what happened tonight could be tied to one person?"

"I've realized it for over an hour."

"Just as a matter of form—do you deny any connection with these three deaths?"

"Emphatically."

"And do you see why that canvas found in the 12th Street studio is sure to put the police on your trail eventually?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Though it does seem strange that making a present to a friend should—"

"I thought Alfred Strong hadn't a friend in this world but Dave."

"Alfred Strong was a much misunderstood young man. Lonely, brilliant, and too introverted to be borne. So obstinate about his shortcomings, too. I only did my best to—well, make him a citizen again. I know that sounds smug, but—"

"Would it interest you to know that you've been accused of hating Strong, because of his influence with your father?"

"Surely you don't believe that."

"Did you know that Strong was said to be thick as treacle with Karl von Merz?"

"Certainly not. He scarcely knew Karl."

"Had you ever heard that Yates was about to make von Merz heir to this island, on your father's death?"

"Mr. Yates told me tonight," said Elsa slowly. "I was supposed to break the news to father tomorrow—with Karl's assistance."

"Thanks one more time, Elsa. At least one thing emerges clearly from this muddle. You're a swell girl, in any language. I think you can face the fact that Tony's death clears up everything for you.

"D'you realize you're free to kick that Austrian orang-outang off this island tomorrow? Line up a hundred percent human staff to take care of your father? Marry Dave when you like?"

Elsa rose slowly from the chair. "Not if I'm behind bars, Jack."

"Exactly. We mustn't waste a minute. I'm going to give von Merz a workout now. Do you suppose Dr. Ulrich could bear to talk at the same time?"

"I think so. He's really taking this matter better than I expected."

"So have you. There's even a chance that you and the press could be friends by morning."

Lord knows I was prepared for anything by that time . . . with the possible exception of what happened next. Elsa Ulrich leaned across my typewriter and kissed me—a cool-salty kiss that

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took the time to make its point thoroughly.

"An excellent chance," she said. Then she walked out, unsmiling as a young Victory on a Viking ship's prow. Not that I was thinking in similies at the moment.

CHAPTER XXI

FISH DON'T TALK BACK

ULRICH and von Merz came in side by side, looking as chipper as a pair of Baltic diplomats on the way to Moscow.

"Sit down, gentlemen. Will you take the armchair, Dr. Ulrich?"

"Not until I have protested vigorously, Mr. Jordan. In case you have forgotten, I happen to own this island. All of it. By what right do you—"

Von Merz counterpointed neatly. "As I have already told you, Hubertus, we will make him regret this tomorrow. The moment it is light, I shall take the launch, and—"

"Sit down, Austria," I said. "Sit down and relax, while I tell Dr. Ulrich all about your *Anchsluss.*"

"What are you saying?"

"I'm opening a little private war here and now. Very much in the open, for Dr. Ulrich's benefit. He may even take sides, if he likes."

Then I threw it at him fast. All Nash had told me, sparing no effort to land the punches. Of course, I was watching Ulrich throughout, not the model poker-face of Dr. Karl von Merz.

"Do you believe this, Hubertus?"

Ulrich twined grave fingers in his beard. "Consider my profession, Mr. Jordan. Remember, I believe only what can be proved. Sometimes, not even then."

I leaned back on that, taking my time about lighting a cigarette, enjoying von Merz's theatrical sigh of relief, the brisk way he polished his glasses for a better glare at me.

"You never suspected him, Doctor?"

"Politics is no concern of mine, Mr. Jordan."

"Isn't that a bit rash, in these times?"

Von Merz crashed through heavily. "You have accused me of betraying my friend. I demand that you substantiate—"

"Sit down again, please. And do stop demanding. Remember I'm still at the wrong end of the artillery. I'm chasing a murderer, Austria—in a direct, old-fashioned way. Checking back on you may be sheer waste, so far as I know. On the other hand, it may break our case. Will you both bear with me?"

Ulrich spoke softly. "Might I ask where you picked up these suspicions?"

I lied glibly. "Don't forget a reporter gets tips from all sides. Surely you can't blame me for chasing more than one story out of New York."

"Are you making these accusations formally, when the police arrive?"

"Would the gentleman on your left still be at large if it were possible to accuse him formally?"

Von Merz relaxed anew. "Thank you for calling his bluff, Hubertus."

"Are you denying that you've used all your influence to crowd Dr. Ulrich off this island?"

"I deny, and denounce—"

"Will you admit that Yates promised to sign the property over to you?"

"Certainly I'll admit that. It may interest you to know that Dr. Ulrich has already invited me to stay here as long as I like."

"Dr. Ulrich happens to have some faults of the scientific mind—a too-kind heart for his colleagues, and complete myopia for the world outside his special field."

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I turned politely to Ulrich. "Of course, his chance to make trouble vanished tonight in the barracuda tank—to put it as crudely as possible. So all we've said so far is quite beside the point. Still, it seemed useful to bring certain facts into the open."

ULRICH studied von Merz musingly, with no visible emotion of any kind. It was the scrutiny of the trained collector, faced with a specimen he cannot classify.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Jordan," said Dr. Ulrich.

"Perhaps I've scattered too much ill-will for one evening. Shall we get to the real purpose of this interview?"

"I think it is high time."

"You first, von Merz. Where were you when you heard that scream, and why?"

"I refuse to answer you, Jack. I have already been insulted enough."

"Shall I put you down as wandering about the island for some purpose of your own, shinnying up the rainpipe to your window with time to spare, and—"

"I was in my bed when it happened—sound asleep. Frank will answer for that."

"Frank has already said he tucked you in, perhaps twenty minutes before the commotion started. That still doesn't explain why you're sitting here now in damp white trunks."

"My white trunks were the first garment handy when I ran out of doors. Naturally they would still be damp. I had been swimming before dinner."

"Perfectly valid, I'm sure. You still can't prove that you *didn't* wear them for another plunge in that lagoon, long after your dinner had settled. Maybe you even went down to the outdoor tanks to say goodnight to the fish."

"Enjoy yourself, Jack, while you can. Tomorrow, every word of this insolence will be reported in the proper—"

I turned back to Ulrich, taking care to keep von Merz in the corner of one eye. "Accepting the word of Dr. von Merz at face value, would you care to give an account of your whereabouts? At ten, you were reading *The Decline of the West* under your study lamp."

"So Elsa told you. It is quite correct. Of course, she does not know that I turned out the light and followed her."

I glanced pointedly at his sleeping coat and battered duck trousers. Ulrich ignored the glance.

"Perhaps a hundred paces down the beach, I paused in the dark. Of course, I knew all along where she would be going. You have accused me of blindness, Mr. Jordan, but I knew also why she wished to meet your young friend on the sandspit. So you see, I stopped and called myself an old fool for interference in the problems of the young.

"Perhaps if I left them in peace, they would make it up at last. Perhaps he might even convince my Elsa that I was competent to manage my affairs here on the cay, without her presence.

"Then I returned at once to my bungalow and my bed. Forgive me for saying this, but my self-control had made me quite happy. I was undressing in the dark when I heard the shouts down by the tank."

He gestured toward his sleeping coat and smiled down at the impromptu trousers. "Like Dr. von Merz, I also seized the first handy garment."

I held up a detaining palm. "Thanks for your cooperation, gentlemen. I think that will do nicely."

Von Merz departed quickly, like a cyclone with no place to go.

Ulrich and I sat facing one another across the oil drum for a long, oddly

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tranquil moment. "Have you ever been stumped in your job, Doctor?"

"Incessantly."

"Isn't it a comfort that your fish can't talk back, when you call them names?"

"A great comfort, Mr. Jordan."

He went out gently, whistling at a winking fin as he passed a tank en route. I watched him pause in the outer door, a small, erect figure against the faint starlight. Then I followed him as far as the steps, and asked for Gail Yates.

CHAPTER XXII

NIGHT LAGOON

"I PUT this off as long as I could. Sure you can bear to talk now?" I looked at her closely, and knew what her answer would be.

"I'm quite recovered. If you'll give me a cigarette, please—"

Yes, she looked amazingly self-contained, even in that pitiless electric light. Tired around the edges of her make-up, of course, but a valiant thirty-six, too. The hand that took my lighter was steady as Plymouth Rock.

"Are these methods really fair to us, Mr. Jordan?"

"I couldn't be more unfair, if I'd planned in advance. On the other hand, we must get ready for the police somehow."

"That's the first thing I meant to ask you. Can we take the—the body into Nassau tomorrow? I'm sure London can handle the launch."

"In the circumstances, I'm afraid we must bring the coroner to the body. Now that there isn't the slightest doubt of murder—"

"Will you permit me to differ with you on that?"

"Certainly. That's why you're here."

"He'd been drinking quite heavily, you know. Even for poor Tony. Isn't it possible that he climbed to the catwalk and stumbled?"

"Not with the evidence on the outside—"

Gail Yates cut in coolly. "There was a great deal of confusion about raising the body. How can you be sure the—the evidence wasn't smeared on that porthole afterward?"

"Please don't get me wrong. At the moment, I'm not sure of anything. Still, it seems reasonable to assume—"

"Don't misunderstand me either, Mr. Jordan. I only meant that murder is such an unequivocal word."

I blinked twice, and started over. "Are you asking me to tell the police that this was all an accident?"

"I'm asking you to keep an open mind. If you weren't a journalist, I'd even ask you to pity me. Surely you must see that Tony's death might be blamed on me, if the word *murder* gets into print."

"But I've already said—"

"Don't be angry, please. I could have done it, you know."

I hesitated, then spoke slowly. "I'd thought of the possibility, from the start."

Mrs. Yates flicked ashes on my copy paper—and brushed them steadily aside. "Do you consider me something of a phenomenon at this moment, Mr. Jordan?"

"I must confess that you're thinking things through rather well."

"You know why, don't you? Must I explain that Tony was not in love with me?"

"Hardly. As you just pointed out, I'm a tabloid reporter."

"Naturally, that makes his death easier for me to bear. Now that we're on the subject, I don't suppose I loved him either. After all, when you go into

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a contract of that sort, knowing your partner's previous record—"

SHE broke off, with a faint but definite smile. "You see how frank I'm being? Why shouldn't I put a knife in his back, from every motive from boredom to jealousy?

"Can you blame me for being a bit confused at the moment—confused enough to talk utter nonsense? Of course he was murdered, Mr. Jordan. We must face the fact, and do our best. I won't be frightened again, really."

"Does Dave know how you feel?"

"Dave has Elsa on his hands. I can hardly expect him to be clear-headed where I'm concerned."

"Forgive me for getting down to cases—but have you any sort of alibi after ten tonight?"

"Only that I turned in about twenty minutes earlier."

"When did you last see Tony?"

"Let me think, now. He was in and out of Miss Ulrich's picnic all the evening. I distinctly recall seeing him link arms with you and go down the sandspit—"

I hesitated, and then took the plunge. "Did you know he was planning a hunting trip to Africa?"

"Planning to meet Pola Kosloff in New York tomorrow—isn't that the correct translation?"

"If you say so, Mrs. Yates."

"Surely you've encountered Miss Kosloff in your profession. She started life as Paula Kennedy, in one of the less desirable corners of New Jersey. Tony spent over fifty thousand dollars to get her into the second Frolics. She was famous for doing a strip-tease, ending with a dive into a tankful of mermen."

She paused, with the slightly sheepish expression of a person who has just escaped making a speech. "I suppose you're wondering why I'm on this island at all. Perhaps I *was* a little jealous—after six years. Jealous enough to make Tony pretend it's a hunting trip all over again. You see? The old bromide in another form. Anything I say is sure to be used against me. Have you anything more to ask?"

"When you came in here, Mrs. Yates, I had no intention of asking you anything—"

Then it was my turn to break a sentence in the middle. Dave was standing in the doorway.

"AND who gave you a vacation from guard duty?" I snapped it at him because I didn't like the interruption, or the thought of my witnesses unguarded.

"Never mind that, Jack. They're sitting in a row on the steps, glaring at each other. No one's going to lift a toe, with all the mutual ill-will you've been generating."

"Perhaps I'd better join the captives," said Gail.

She was quite dry-eyed as she left the building without looking at either of us.

"Light into me," said Dave. "I know I deserve it."

"Take it easy. Being a policeman is always a lonely business."

"I had talk to someone, Jack. Not one of them will speak to me. Not even Elsa."

"Maybe she's talked too much already."

"What d'you mean?"

I told him, with illustrations.

"Do you think she killed Tony?"

"On the facts we have now, most district attorneys would ask for a warrant, at least."

"Using what for evidence?"

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"Alec's cockeyed testimony. The fact she was fresh from the water—and could give no account of her whereabouts after twenty minutes of ten."

"She was with me."

I said:

"Have you a watch to prove that? Frank claims he saw her on the sandspit, running out on you. Elsa herself says she dove into the lagoon to escape another one of your proposals. In any event, she had ample time to swim to the outdoor tanks, surprise Tony, and—"

"So did everyone else on this island. I might point out the fact that *you're* dripping wet at this moment."

"Don't raise your voice, youngster. Just take that witness chair and explain a few facts yourself. Why didn't you come clean in the beginning about that damned picture?"

"What damned picture?"

"*After the Storm,* or what have you. You might have told me that Elsa gave the thing to Zoo-bug."

Dave sighed wearily.

"I'm telling you I bought those canvases through several dealers. How could I remember one from another?"

"Check," I said wearily.

"If she chose to take one off the nail herself, and hand it over to Strong—"

"To hell with all this, Dave. Will you take a little honest advice? The minute it's light, put Ulrich and Elsa in that launch, and slam back to Nassau. Or Andros. Wherever you can find a British flag—and a patrol boat."

"Why?"

"Because it'll give you first whack. Because it's logical that the owner of Yates cay, his daughter, and the brother of the deceased should report to the law. Tell your story straight, from the beginning."

DAVE spoke slowly. "I'm afraid that would be a waste of gasoline, Jack. You see, there's a police boat on its way from Nassau now."

"Say that again, please."

"Don't look so startled—there's no black magic about it. Just a press agent's inspiration at the wrong moment."

"Why didn't I hear of this before?"

"You know perfectly well why. I was ashamed to admit I'd gone yellow."

I braced him firmly in the armchair. "Count ten and start over."

"I arranged it yesterday afternoon at Government House, Jack. Right after you gave me that gun."

"Don't stop; you can catch your breath later."

"Maybe it was the first time I realized how serious things could be out here. Anyhow, it occurred to me that two automatics might not be enough protection for the Ulrichs. Especially with two bum shots behind them. When I came out of that brainstorm, I was up at Government House, sounding out Charley Munger."

"You mean, the Governor's military aide?"

"I've known Charley since we first came to Nassau. It was easy to talk him into sending us a patrol boat tomorrow—without getting him suspicious too."

"And how's that done?"

"By bringing up that newsreel camera, of course. I said that history of a sort was being made on Yates Cay. That it was only good advertising technique, to include a little British pageantry. So Charley is shipping us an inspector, and at least four assistants. Dress uniforms, in a fully manned police boat."

"Why didn't they escort us out this morning?"

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"How could I tell Charley the real facts, without bringing Tony down on my neck?"

"And when is this relief squad due?"

"Charley thought they might stop first at Andros, on an official errand. I suppose they'll come over the Bank with the tide."

I sat quietly, digesting it. "So we're both on our mettle from now on?"

"Don't look at me like that. Wasn't it the most natural precaution?"

"Very. Offhand, I can't think of a simpler way of delivering Miss Ulrich into the hands of the—"

Dave was on his feet, shouting back. "What about the cockeyed way you've run this inquiry? Setting all of us against each other—"

"Would *you* like to take charge?"

But there wasn't time to argue the point, after all. Not when Frank burst in on us with both eyes popping through those horn rims, like a rabbit with the jitters. Neither of us waited to hear what he had to say.

The steps were empty as I charged out. Then I saw the lot of them, clustered on the end of the dock, staring down at a sleek black seal puffing through the water below. Only it wasn't a seal, but London—swimming strongly in against the tide, with the painter of Frank's rowboat in his teeth.

Frank himself had gone overboard in a rush to help, long before I could jump down to the pier with Dave on my heels, and shoulder through to the string-piece.

By that time, of course, I knew why they were all looking down at the water without speaking. Then the rowboat swung crazily against the stringpiece, and I saw Jim Flagg tumbled in the thwarts, one arm trailing across the gunwale, and his throat ripped open.

CHAPTER XXIII

I'VE MET THE MURDERER

DAVE herded the others back to give me room, so I was quite alone when I jumped down into the sternsheets of that rowboat. London tied up somehow while I was checking on details.

The body lolled in the bottom, looking grotesquely at ease, until you noticed the head, smashed back against an oarlock with enough force to fracture the skull. I lifted one limp hand out of the water, examined a bit of black string clutched in the fist, and folded it over Jim's chest.

London loomed above me on the wharf now, shaking the water from his wool; Frank stood just beyond, looking down at me anxiously. I don't suppose my voice had the proper drawing-room modulation as I began barking questions.

"Can you understand what London is telling you, Mr. Jordan?"

I pushed him back firmly. "You've seen enough tonight, Hardy. Don't look at this, too."

"Shouldn't I help you to lift him out?"

"Jim stays put, until the Nassau coroner comes through that reef. If you want to be useful, go stand by Dave."

Not that there was much more to do, but I felt I could use the breather just the same. After I had jumped to the dock with an assist from a long black arm, I stood on the string-piece for awhile, staring across the pale water at the reef, a vague ribbon of darkness, definite as a false horizon.

My wristwatch brought me sharply back to reality. Almost three. Perhaps an hour before the first glimmer of light. That patrol boat might be

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anchored off the shoals now, puzzled by all this Mazda glare, waiting only for the tide.

I turned on my heel and started back toward the aquaria. London loped after me promptly. Not that he seemed frightened, or particularly moved. Perhaps you can take anything in your stride, when you're that close to Father Neptune.

Our party had collapsed by common consent on the steps of the indoor aquarium. No one spoke when I upended a crate and sat down facing them. No one even stirred, until Elsa leaned forward to pat Dave's shoulder.

"Who saw him first?"

Frank spoke promptly. "I did, sir. That is, I heard London blowing like a porpoise, and ran down to see—"

"Whereupon the rest of you took advantage of Dave's absence, and followed?"

Nash cut in. "I hope you don't mind too much, Jack?"

I ignored the feeble sarcasm, noting, with a kind of grim pleasure, that Alec's voice had gone gray as his manner. "Does anyone have the remotest idea how it happened?"

But I was facing the old blank wall again. My voice had an uncomfortably hollow sound, as though I were listening to an echo. Von Merz got up with an elaborate yawn.

"I for one intend to lie down a while."

Looking back on it now, I'm sure that automatic went off with no conscious volition on my part. The glass splintered in a window pane behind him—just a safe six inches beyond the bristles of that Austrian pompadour. Von Merz dropped to hands and knees with heart-warming celerity.

It was really something to see—our Austrian in that position.

CURIOUSLY enough, the noise seemed to have a soothing effect on everyone. At least, there were no protests as I escorted Von Merz back to his place on the steps—not too forcibly.

"Jim Flagg was one of my best friends in New York," I said. "So I'm not apologizing to anyone for that shot across the bows. Sit down, Doc. I'll tell you when to turn in. As a matter of fact, that last question of mine was purely rhetorical. You see, I know exactly how Jim was killed, and why.

"When he went out to the reef tonight with his Leica, London had been there for some time, repairing a beacon. Jim asked him to pose against the night sky. Then he walked down the reef alone, taking a few seascapes.

"London doesn't know just when he started to row back to the cay; the ebb had started, and he was hurrying to finish his job. You can picture his surprise, when he *did* quarter out into the tide, and met the rowboat drifting out to the Bank.

"Both oars were gone, and the skiff seemed empty. Then he noticed Jim's hand trailing over the gunwale. More fist than hand, really, with a bit of the cable-release from that camera still clutched tightly in the fingers.

"Check. Let's go back to the beginning again. Shortly after ten tonight, as we know, Tony Yates was spread-eagled against that tank—on the land side—stabbed in the back, and boosted in by someone bold enough to climb the catwalk afterward, to see how well a dozen barracuda could finish his job.

"That's one of the few facts I'm prepared to swear to when the police arrive. I'll also swear that Jim was sculling in from the reef at that precise moment. That he saw the figure, in silhouette, atop that barracuda tank.

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That he rowed quietly up to investigate.

"Remember, all five of those outdoor tanks are built flush with the edge of the lagoon. Why couldn't Jim come close enough to take a candid-camera of that killer—in the act of admiring his handiwork?

"Must I explain the rest? Tony's murderer must have plunged for that lagoon—and the rowboat—in something less than a flash. Jim must have been slapped back into the thwarts, before he could tell death from a thunderbolt. It was his dying shout that brought you on the run—not Tony's.

"Naturally, the killer had to move like lightning, after that scream. There was just time to snatch that damning camera, and swim back to hiding. No time to upset the skiff, or salvage the oars, or give this death even the faint air of suicide."

I paused for reactions, received none, and went firmly on. "Does that seem a reasonable layout to give the authorities tomorrow? Does any one object to being searched on the spot for that missing camera—the film—or both?"

No one protested while Dave went through the motions. A simple enough frisk, considering their advanced state of undress.

"Surely you didn't expect results from that, Jack?" said Nash.

"No, Alec," I murmured patiently. "It was a gesture for the record, pure and simple. It's a hundred-to-one bet that Jim's camera and film are at the bottom of the lagoon now. Washed clean of fingerprints, along with the knife that did both jobs. Of course, we've a fair chance of finding them in an hour or so, once the sun is up."

"And what will that prove?"

"Only that I'm right, so far. I'm sure Dr. Ulrich will lend the police his diving casque."

Then I realized that my story was running away with me, and rose from my improvised chair, pulling Dave up with a look. "With Elsa's permission —will you march her guests up to the cottage? It'll be much easier to keep an eye on them there, and the ones with consciences can sleep, if they like."

AFTER I had sent London back to the dock to mount guard over Jim, I paused for a good minute, all alone in the shadow of the last big tank, watching the lights wink on in the cottage windows.

Nothing could have seemed more grotesque than the cheerful glow of those windows, the domestic clatter in the kitchen. I decided the kitchen would make as good a point of attack as any, entered quietly by the back door, locked it behind me, and pocketed the key.

Elsa, intent over a coffee percolator, looked up coolly.

"I hope you don't mind the invasion?"

"And what would you say if I did?"

"Nothing very helpful, I'm afraid. You see, there's no other spot on the island where we can really segregate you, as a group. Now that this door is locked, Dave and I can take turns mounting guard on the veranda. Anyone who honestly wishes to sleep—"

Then I sat down on a stool at her feet, and rubbed my salt-stiffened hair wearily. "Something tells me I've gone into that before. Maybe I'm a lot more tired than I'll admit—even to myself."

Elsa poured coffee without being asked. "You've earned this, Jack. Unless you're afraid it's drugged—"

I inhaled the aroma gratefully, watching her pour brandy from a tall dark bottle in the cupboard. "Just between

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us, I wish it *was* drugged. And don't try to bribe me into telling more than I know. I've done that once tonight."

"Shouldn't you warn everyone that the police are on their way?"

"Maybe it would be good psychology, at that. I haven't quite decided." Then I sat up very straight, and blinked at her. "When did Dave find time to tell you that?"

"This evening, on the sandspit. Isn't it wonderful, the way he looks out for me?"

"Maybe it's time we joined the others," I murmured faintly.

"You'll find them nicely bunched in the living room," said Elsa. "I'll be along the minute I've ruined this omelette. Every egg we brought from Nassau—"

GOING gingerly down the narrow hall, I noted that they had already stripped down both bedrooms to make a communal shakedown in the living room beyond.

They made a strange *genre* picture in that tiny space. Gail was fast asleep on the couch—a feat explained adequately by the bottle of luminal beside her.

Von Merz and Nash sat like twin gargoyles on the other cot, while Ulrich crouched in his armchair with *The Decline of the West*. Frank was perched respectfully on a hassock just beyond.

Dave, standing in the veranda doorway with his arms folded over his .38, looked up glumly.

"All shipshape so quickly?"

"Doesn't everyone look comfortable?"

I picked up the luminal. "Mrs. Yates seems to be the wisest one here. Would any of you like to split a pill, before I give you all something pleasant to sleep on?"

They heard me through in silence as I spoke briefly of Dave's visit to Government House yesterday—with results. Nash was the first to speak.

"I hope this makes you very happy, Jack."

"Like so much headache powder." I glanced at my wristwatch. "Believe it or not, I don't intend to keep anyone awake a moment longer. You've enough mattresses, and two efficient guards to make sure no one is hurt in his sleep. Miss Ulrich will soon be out of the kitchen with refreshments. Will you join me on the terrace, Dave?"

Then I went out fast, snatching up two canvas chairs on the way, which I carried well out of earshot on the terrace beyond. Dave emerged slowly from the cottage, backing down to join me like a cautious crab.

"Sit down, youngster, and put that gun away. We're having no more sudden death tonight."

"Elsa shouldn't be there alone."

"Of course she shouldn't—from your personal point of view. On the other hand, can she come to any harm, so long as we keep that veranda door—and our eyes—wide open?"

"I suppose not, Jack. Only—"

"Keep right on. Take the top of my head off, if you like. My brains could stand a little air right now."

"Sorry I lost my temper, back there in the aquarium. But I'm damned if I see why you've been passing out all these blueprints."

"Can't I play my game like an honest detective, even though I *am* up a tree?"

"And build up enough suspicion inside that bungalow to blow out the walls?"

"Thanks for putting it so graphically, Dave. That's exactly what I've been working for."

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"You mean you want an explosion before the police arrive?"

"I mean that I've been handing out blueprints right and left for one purpose—to scare our killer into showing his hand. I mean that we're probably licked, unless I *can* scare him, this side of sunrise."

"Of all the naïve—"

"Perhaps it isn't so naïve as you imagine. Just because I'm confessing to *you* that I'm set back on my heels, with our one important clue gone overboard . . . Please remember that the murderer has no idea how desperate we are. All he can be sure of, right now, is the fact that I was swimming in the lagoon when he went after Jim's life. Can't you see that our only chance is to bottle him up—and wait?"

"Why not put them all on the grill again?"

"And confess that my case isn't complete as it stands?"

"But you haven't even begun to—"

"Who says I haven't? I know all I need to know now, Dave. All I'm asking is proof."

Yes, it was the time to make my point, all right. I spoke as quietly as I could, taking the extra precaution of anchoring him by both lapels. "You see, I've known since ten tonight who killed your brother."

CHAPTER XXIV

RUN, CHILDREN, RUN

I'D EXPECTED a real outburst, but nothing happened. Dave merely settled back in his deck chair as I released my strangle hold.

"Are you stealing Alec's act? Or is this on the level?"

"I'm telling you that I could wind up this case now—with one connecting link. Incidentally, you're in on the ground floor only because your faith in me needs a few vitamins."

"All right, Jack. Let's see if I'm for or against you. According to your private brain wave, we've locked up a killer in that cottage, hoping he'll go off the deep end in the next hour or so.

"Suppose he's smarter than you think. Suppose he has guessed—as I have—that you're at the end of your rope, and dangling in space. Suppose he just sits tight, brazens out the inquiry—"

"You can answer that yourself. Elsa's number will be up for fair."

"Don't start *that* record again, please."

"Now you've got me in the mood, I'm playing nothing else. Furthermore, you've got to listen. Providing, of course, that the girl's future means anything to you."

"Go on, Jack."

"Headache Number One involves a snarl of events linking Adam Foster's death in New York to the three we've stumbled on since—Zoo-bug's, Tony's, and Jim's. Check. We've fought that out before. Let's repeat the process, in the light of the present.

"From the law's point of view, Elsa Ulrich can easily be hooked up with Foster's demise—thanks to that picture, which is also the connecting link to Strong's drowning in Bermuda. Alec Nash is all primed to insist that she was jealous of Strong for his hold on old Ulrich."

I took a new grip on his lapels. "Let's say that Elsa was in love with Strong—or Foster—or both. Let's assume she was afraid of Foster—for a hundred reasons. So afraid, she poisoned him in that studio, while old Zoo-bug was busy elsewhere."

"Who's going to prove that?"

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"Foster died in the night, only a few hours before Elsa boarded the *Monarch of Bermuda*. Can she account for her whereabouts every moment of her last night in New York?"

"Why couldn't Strong have done the job himself?"

"Very well—think it through from that angle. A jealous sweetheart, doing away with his rival. Brooding over it on the boat to Bermuda. Threatening to pin the guilt on Elsa. Isn't that enough for the first imponderable?"

"Quite."

"THE second headache is really down to earth: the advantage Tony's death would give the Ulrichs at this time. Elsa has already admitted that she knew all about the plan to transfer the island to von Merz.

"It doesn't really matter if von Merz is a Nazi or a nihilist or both.

"Elsa's motive for saving her father's life work is still disturbingly valid. Plus the fact that no one else on this island had a demonstrable reason for wishing Tony dead."

"What about Gail?"

"Show me a cause and effect there, if you can. Your sister-in-law has put up with Tony's hunting trips for a good six years. Why would she suddenly go out of her head, just because he's planning to start on another?

"Or take the rest, in any order you like. Von Merz had every reason under Heaven for wishing Tony well tonight. So did Alec, who was probably getting a nice fat check for putting on that fake safari act."

"Don't forget old Ulrich himself."

"In my opinion, the Old Master was honestly friendly with von Merz, and completely in ignorance of Tony's change of heart—unless he's the greatest actor since Booth the Younger. Of course, Frank or London could have been bribed to do the job; or you may have gone to bat to save your girl—"

I released him on that, but he was sitting quietly beside me now, and thinking fast.

"Let's dig a bit below the surface, Dave, and decide how our visiting list will coöperate with the police, once they start baying down the inevitable trail.

"Nash, as you know, will lose no time bringing up his cockeyed story. von Merz is wary as a king cobra now; purely from self-defense, he's going to deny the charge of espionage, and grant that there may be something in the rest.

"Ulrich will have to admit that at least part of Alec's fantasy has a basis in fact. Even Mrs. Yates can't help doing her bit, when she tells about your budding romance with Elsa. You, of course, will supply the final touch by gallantly attempting to give Elsa an alibi—which Frank, the green-eyed adolescent, will as promptly shatter."

"Why must you keep rubbing that in?"

"Because all the dynamite on this island isn't stored in that bungalow. Maybe I'm waiting for an explosion from you, too."

I glanced up innocently toward the veranda, and got to my feet. "At any rate, here comes the object of our discussion, bearing a snack for her jailers. Suppose I report all we've just said—and await results?"

IN THE circumstances, I'm really ashamed to admit how much I enjoyed that omelette. Dave dug in too, with all the symptoms of the prisoner who ate a hearty breakfast.

In fact, there *was* something protective about Elsa Ulrich at that moment, as she loomed in the penumbra,

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smiling down at us. Women have undoubtedly smiled down on feeding males like that ever since the first fire of the Stone Age.

"Will you start the conversation, Dave, or shall I?"

"No one's going to bother Elsa now. She has enough to worry about."

But Elsa had already sat down calmly between us. "Anything that keeps me out of doors a little longer is more than welcome. Won't you go on, Jack?"

Dave was beside her in a flash, with one arm around those Amazonian shoulders. "Haven't you already asked this young lady everything you can think of?"

"Almost," I admitted sadly. "My next query was more in the nature of a sporting proposition. One I made to you earlier this morning, Dave. I'll repeat it now for Miss Ulrich's benefit. How would the pair of you like to commandeer the launch, and make a run for it?"

Elsa spoke sharply. "What would we be running from?"

"Tell her," said Dave gloomily. "You've got your buildup."

I repeated what we had just discussed, as completely as possible. "After all, you're too intelligent not to see what you're up against. Now that this young zealot has speeded up our timetable by a good twenty-four hours—"

"You really think the police will charge me—"

"Unless you can establish a threefold alibi, and prove that you never visited that 12th Street studio."

"But that's ridiculous. In fact, I know at least one other artist in that same block. A real one, of course."

"Can you account for your whereabouts the night that Foster died?"

"I'm afraid not. You see, father and I were staying at a small hotel on the West Side—near the Museum. That was the night of the farewell dinner, of course. Father and Alfred had gone on to the Society, leaving me at home to close our books and pack. There wasn't so much as a chambermaid on the floor to vouch for me."

I reached solemnly in my pocket, plucked out a bunch of keys, and tossed them into Dave's lap. "When I helped get your brother's body on dry land, these spilled out of the pocket. With all the good will in the world, I'd advise you to use them."

"You must see that's impossible," Elsa said.

"Don't worry about your father this time, please. I'm standing guard until the police boat comes. . . . That short one is the ignition key."

"And what would we gain by running now? Wouldn't it establish—"

"You'd still have time to jump a plane for Miami, get up to New York and lawyers. Dave could back your side for all he's worth, insist there be no extradition until a case could be proved."

"Answer one question for me, Jack. Do you by any chance think I'm guilty?"

"I stopped thinking long ago, Elsa. Right now, I'm only reacting to hunches. One of them tells me you're in a bad spot here and could use a fast mud-scow to Nassau."

Dave put a sudden hand on my arm. "I'm going to ask you to do us a great favor, Jack."

"Shoot. Lord knows why, I'm in a mellow mood."

"Will you stroll down to the dock and back and let us talk this over, alone?"

"Have I ever stood in the way of an honest jail-break?"

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CHAPTER XXV

FULL FATHOMS FIVE

THEY were still staring after me when I climbed slowly down the concrete blocks on my way to the pier. Not that I had to turn to guess that they were already in each other's arms, too.

Like most strolls without a destination, mine was over almost before it began. Remembering what was floating in that skiff a little ways beyond, I paused irresolute on the first plank of the dock, until it occurred to me that I might see how London was making out as watchman.

I was just in time to hear the unmistakable slap of limbs on water, as the long black seal snaked down for bottom, between the string-piece and the launch's moorings.

London broke surface far out in the slowly graying lagoon, favored me with an uncommunicative scowl, and sounded again. When he appeared a second time—now in the full glare of the arc-light on the pier's end—he handed up a dark, wet object sparkling with broken glass. Jim's Leica, with the lens smashed and the leather case ripped from end to end.

I opened the box quite mechanically, just to make sure the film was missing, walked down the dock just as woodenly, and compared the end of the broken cable-release with the fragment clutched in Jim's fist. Then I sat down on the string-piece to watch the black seal explore bottom a good fifteen feet below.

London came up at my feet, showed his empty hands, and sounded again. This time, I held my breath, and glanced at my wristwatch. I was still holding it—for the fifth time—when he swam slowly back to the surface. Maybe he had gills behind his ears after all; maybe I was just winded from excitement.

"No sign of that film, eh? Want to try again?"

I let him go down two more times while I thought it out. Then I gave him a hand up to the string-piece.

"Don't waste your breath. Tell me how you spotted the camera."

He was still explaining when we heard the footstep far down the wharf. London heard it first, in fact, and stopped dead, rising with an odd show of manners when Elsa approached briskly.

"Back to shore with you, London. Mr. Jordan and I have things to talk over."

I made room for her on the string-piece. "Did you bring the keys?"

"Dave wanted me to take them, but

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I refused. Do I have to tell you why?"

"Naturally not. In the circumstances, you'd be a damned fool to stir a foot. I only made the offer to convince Dave—"

"Of what?"

"That my heart's in the right place."

"So is mine. Do you think I'd leave my father *now?*"

I PUT the camera on the wharf between us. "Don't let's lose time arguing that point. Tell me what you make of this."

Elsa studied the Leica carefully. "I wondered what London was diving for."

"He says he padded out here a while ago, to make sure things were snug aboard the launch. That's when he noticed the sparkle of that broken lens on a coral ledge. Of course, he thought the film must have spilled out on the bottom."

"No luck on that, I suppose?"

"Not unless he swallowed it on the way up."

Elsa dropped overside with the concentration of a plummet. This time, I forgot to hold my breath, watching her progress among the coral clusters. When she broke surface again, you were scarcely aware of a transition. She changed elements with the effortless ease of a ripple on the shore.

But her hands were empty, as London's had been so many times before. She held them open; said:

"I'm afraid it's a pointless search, Jack. Even by daylight, there are a thousand nooks and crannies down there—too deep to explore without a diving casque. It was the most outright luck in the world that the camera dropped in plain view."

"Not that it helps us much," I said dourly. "Except to clinch a point I was already sure of. Do come up here beside me again. Or are you more at home in salt water?"

Elsa rested both elbows on the string-piece, by way of compromise. "What's the point, Jack? Or have you slipped out of your confiding mood?"

"On the contrary. I only meant that the killer was far too shrewd to drop that film near the dock—if he dropped it overboard at all."

Elsa looked at me questioningly.

"Surely it wouldn't be of any value as evidence, once the water had touched its surface."

I shrugged.

"Probably not, but there is a hundred to one chance something could be done with it in a darkroom." I was on my feet now, pacing back toward shore. Elsa paralleled with a gentle backstroke.

"I'd help if I could, you know."

"Then stay right where you are, and go into a little geometry with me. How long is this dock, from shore to string-piece?"

"At least four hundred feet."

"Is the water really deep, right up to the sides of the aquaria?"

"Six feet or more."

"Jim could have rowed up to the tank to take that candid camera?"

"Why not?"

"As I reconstruct his death, the killer must have made a flying leap for the gunwale of that skiff. Would you mind demonstrating that it's possible?"

ELSA scrambled ashore without a word, mounted a ladder, and crossed the catwalk coolly, pausing on the edge of the aquarium in a heart-stopping silhouette against the vague promise of morning. I pulled myself together firmly; after all, this was a problem in geometry, not aesthetics.

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"Will you plunge straight out into the lagoon?"

Elsa obliged with a long raking dive that carried her fifteen feet offshore. And when she came up:

"Well, Jack?"

I scratched my head, feeling pretty annoyed about everything.

"Well, Elsa, my geometry is getting foggier by the minute."

"Are you wondering why this murderer jumped into the skiff here, snatched the camera, and swam a good hundred yards to dispose of it?"

"I'm not wondering; I'm telling you it's impossible. In the first place, those lights were on, the length of the dock, only a minute or so after Jim screamed. Remember, I was cutting in from the lagoon myself, with all the steam I had.

"People were running out of their sleeping quarters, and Frank had already reached the tanks. In other words, the only chance that killer had was to dig back for land and mix with the procession.

"So all right—

"Let's reconstruct a little more exactly from that point on. If the camera had been found near shore, we'd be right back where we started—waiting for the police with our last clue gone. The fact that London discovered it at the *end* of the dock brings up a brand new possibility. What would you say if I insisted that the film is still on dry land—intact?"

"But surely no criminal would be so stupid—"

"Suppose *someone else* was watching the battle from a safe distance. Suppose that person got the point in a flash, and swam boldly up in time to snatch the camera out of poor Jim's hand, forcing the murderer to swim for his life."

I let it trail off, as Elsa swam up to the pier, and pulled herself up beside me in one sleek, unbroken curve.

"Think all you like, Jack."

"I'm basing my new brainstorm on two solid facts. The figure I spotted on the catwalk, and the distinct sound of a swimmer ahead of me, when I did my own exploring at ten o'clock. Let's say that swimmer was just as bold as I imagined. Bold enough to take that camera in his teeth, and backtrack with thirty whole seconds to spare.

"That could have been done; and if it *was* done—

"What comes next? The camera is hidden somewhere—still intact. Our snooper mingles freely with the herd, submits to my cockeyed third degree—and snatches his prize from its hiding place, the moment he is sure no one is looking.

"His next problem is to find a quiet moment in which to pry out the film. That moment comes when Dave, my none too efficient watchman, leaves the group alone on the steps. As one of that group, you ran out to the pier when London towed in the skiff. Will you take the play-back, from that point on?"

Elsa stirred the lagoon thoughtfully with one toe. "I'm afraid I can't be very helpful. Anyone might have dropped a camera overboard, there in the dark."

"What about the film? Remember, we searched the lot of you not five minutes later."

"Are you suggesting that it's hidden on the end of the pier or in the launch?"

I reached for the .38 in my belt, slowly enough not to alarm her. But Elsa Ulrich was already looking thoughtfully down the dock.

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"Now that you mention it, someone *did* jump aboard the launch for a moment, just as the skiff came into view. If only I could remember—"

I cut her off there, touching her arm lightly:

"Come along; we've a lot of fast digging to do."

She was with me on the run. This time, I had made no effort to keep the excitement out of my voice.

We must have gone all of a dozen paces when every light on that island snapped down to blackout.

CHAPTER XXVI

TURMOIL ISLAND

LOOKING back on it now, I'm sure that London saved my life. Left to my own devices, I would have charged straight to the switch box instead of inching around the corner of the last outdoor tank for a cautious look.

London himself was doing just that when I came up, and slapped me back against the concrete with one roundhouse swing. Consequently, I let the bullet whine past, without stopping it with my chest.

I didn't move.

Elsa crept up beside me, and spoke in an astonishingly normal tone. "Sure you weren't hit?"

I said:

"I'm still too numb to know. Did you stay under cover?"

"Completely. What comes next?"

But London had already answered that by starting a slow but efficient wriggle toward the aquarium door. Who says they can't see in the dark? Strain my eyes as best I could, it was still pitch dark beyond that doorway when he jumped to his feet and darted inside.

Elsa had followed before I could pull her back. I set my teeth, and jumped up too. Then we heard the dull plunge beyond, followed in a moment by another heavier splash.

I felt my way into the doorway, and fumbled among the light switches, jerking back sharply from a snarl of mangled fuses.

"And how do you reconstruct that, Jack?"

"Someone must have counted on finding the three of us on the dock when he smashed those connections. Thanks to you, London was near enough to put up some kind of an argument—until that gun entered the picture."

I listened intently at the entrance. No sound but the quiet bubbling of those indoor tanks, like so many goldfish bowls under an amplifier.

"They both took a header into the lagoon, all right."

"Then why are we standing here?"

Her voice was impatient.

"I'm trying to locate Frank's flashlight. Doesn't he keep it somewhere handy?"

"Try that shelf, just inside."

My fingers closed gratefully on the hard, round bulk. It was easy to follow London's damp footprints now—straight for the stair leading to the mezzanine, then backtracking in the direction of the cots. Apparently the sharpshooter had bolted through the open grating beside Nash's bed—with London not too far behind. At least, that was the jumping off place for footprints.

I darted the bull's-eye about the cubby-hole, pausing at the army cot. The revolver had been hidden here, so hastily, that a corner still showed under the pillow. The barrel felt warm when I picked it up gingerly in my

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handkerchief, and compared it to the one in my other hand.

It was Dave's .38, all right.

"Back to the house, Miss Ulrich—fast."

WE REACHED the bungalow in a hiatus of pure speed, heading instinctively for the kitchen door, where we began to pick up the picture in reserve. The shattered lock, and the accordion-pleated icetray that had done the smashing.

I paused in the hall, noting that the door to one of the bedrooms was closed tightly. Then I slammed on into the empty living room.

Gail Yates, still heavy-lidded, knelt in the pale frame of the doorway beyond, with someone's head on her knee. My circulation started in again, when I saw that it was Dave. He seemed to be breathing normally, despite the pigeon's egg behind one ear.

I dropped to my knees beside her. Elsa had been there long ago, doing things competently with a basin and cold compresses. Now that I could stop concentrating a little, I noticed a confused beat of footsteps on the terrace just beyond. One of those perceptions that hover in the fringe of consciousness, without distracting you from more important business. . . .

"Don't cry please, Miss Ulrich. It's only a bad knock, not a fracture."

"I'm not crying," said Elsa. "And why don't *you* do something with that arsenal in your belt?"

But they needed my help after all, getting Dave to a comfortable position in the veranda couch. They also needed a few firm words to calm their mounting hysteria, before I dared return to the hall and hammer on the door.

Nash spoke petulantly from within. "Go way, Jack. I'm not coming out."

Of course, there was only one answer for that one. I set my shoulder against the knob, and crashed through, upsetting the flimsy barricade of furniture beyond, and landing with my head almost in Alec's lap.

Almost.

He didn't look much like a front-page explorer at that moment, either. With his wig gone, and his front plate missing, he could have passed for a night watchman who had just been fired for tippling on the job.

I picked myself up with dignity. "Give, Alec, give."

But he wasn't giving.

"I've said my last word to you long ago."

"Where's everyone?"

"How should I know?"

I banged him soundly against the wall, bringing a fine shower of plaster down about our ears. Alec spoke doggedly from the midst of the falling debris.

"Why don't you go outside and see for yourself?"

It sounded like a first-class suggestion, when I heard Frank shout from the veranda.

So I started moving and moved very fast indeed.

I remember checking briefly on Dave en route. Mrs. Yates was still at the foot of the couch, asleep sitting up. Now I was trailing Frank and Elsa, who seemed to be traveling by instinct and a sense of touch. Down through the shadows of the outdoor tanks, and out to the dock again.

Dr. Ulrich flashed into the picture now, beard rampant as he charged for the string-piece, shouting in German at the launch, which had slipped from moorings like a giddy ghost, and was pointing a cautious prow for the barrier reef.

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ELSA and I pulled up short beside him. Everyone seemed to be shouting in unison now—including Frank, who had already gone overside in a vain effort to snatch at the trailing painter.

The light was much clearer out on the lagoon, as the water began to pick up a faint light from the east. There was London, a solid black mass, plowing doggedly in the wake like a spent torpedo.

You could even see the figure at the wheel, crouching a little, with one ear turned to the cough of the cold motor. A target—

I blazed away at him promptly. Once, high in the air. Again, at the thrash of the propeller, with some vague notion of damaging the gasline.

Frank dragged himself up from the water, and put a respectful hand on my arm.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Jordan?"

"Permit him, please," said Ulrich. "At the University, he is pistol champion of his battalion."

"R.O.T.C., of course," said Frank.

I put the .38 in his hand, watching incredulously. He blasted a window in the forward cabin, just beyond the crouching helmsman.

"Did that scare him, Mr. Jordan?"

"Chimpanzees don't scare easily," I said. "Don't you dare wing him?"

Frank considered. "Not at this range, sir—unless Dr. Ulrich will be responsible."

The launch was a good two hundred yards away now, and picking up speed, despite the coughing motor.

"Fire!" shouted Ulrich.

Frank stretched flat on the dock, with both elbows on the string-piece, drew a painstaking bead on the forward hatch, and sent a bullet crashing into the cockpit. The figure tumbled away from the wheel, just as the launch gave a crazy yaw, almost as though it had come into the wind under sail.

I was still blinking when the black seal swarmed over the bow, and slapped down into the cabin.

There must have been a scuffle of some kind, muted by distance. Then London's head and shoulders thrust up above the wheel again. The engines were turning over in earnest when he roared back, cut the power with a fine sense of timing, and jumped ashore with the painter in his fist.

Then we all fell silent as Dr. Karl von Merz climbed out to the dock, looking slightly bloody but quite unbowed, and smiling serenely.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

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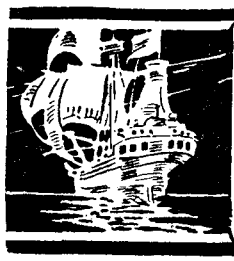

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

THERE are loud guns trained upon us this week, and we must be thankful that we are in the pleasant company of Theodore Roscoe. Not long ago and purely in the interests of good fiction we published Mr. Roscoe's "Death Below Zero"; now that story has set fire to a gentleman who feels we were plugging for Fascism. He says we are poisoning the minds of our readers.

We aren't going to argue the point of view which our correspondent sets forth with so much vehemence; that's not our job. Also we don't quite know how to prove that we wouldn't poison anybody—not even for a raise in salary. But our small and venal nature is aroused to protest the statement that the readers of ARGOSY have "child minds." Last week somebody was insisting that the readers had to be addressed in one-syllable words, and here is somebody else suggesting that their minds have an infantile fragility. It is all very motherly, but unflattering.

We have a quaint notion that people buy ARGOSY because they want to read good stories. We, of course, want to make a lot of money. So our policy is to select stories on the basis of their excellence as fiction; we don't think we will get rich by turning this magazine into a forum for the debate of various ideologies. That's how we figure it, and every time the emissary of a sinister foreign power comes in, clinking his gold, we send the office boy out to get rid of him. Then we go back to reading stories.

CLINTON COFFIN

For thirty years it has been my shameless but regular habit to buy and read ARGOSY, deeming your magazine harmless and occasional anodyne to drab workaday life. However, after perusing "Death Below Zero," by Roscoe, in your current issue, I find the habit permanently destroyed.

Today, even in our weltering world, a faint hope does live and grow that not for always will men like you and your owners feel so free to poison for profit the child minds of readers. That hope lives because fifteen hundred boys of the Lincoln Battalion died cheerfully in Spain—first American soldiers since Gettysburg to understand yet will their sacrifice. And every slimey line of the Roscoe piece traduces damnably those men, their cause, and their leadership.

The hope brightens because the scientific devotion of the Red Army disclosed its power swiftly to cut alike the Artic barriers and the resistance of Finnish fascism. So the Roscoe yarn spews out again the stale and now cynically retracted falsehoods our commercial press concocted about Soviet soldiery in its losing winter campaign to get the United States into war.

*

Lastly, the hope rises higher because two individuals now clearly placed in history—Butcher Mannerheim and Kidnapper Wallenius—have been shown up once again as terrible enemies of helpless civilian population—masters of concentration camps and torture chambers—and feeble, futile and faint when faced in open war. So precisely these two does your rotten screed pick out for oily glorification from the unfailing font of its anti-social mendacity.

As said, the true hope in these matters is dim and far. But my dimes were present and apparent. You can cut the ARGOSY print order by at least one copy in the future.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

NOW take a deep breath and start thinking about stories again. Here is one of those costume-fiction devotees we wanted to hear from; he is, we're pleased to note, a general admirer of ARGOSY.

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THAD DOTY

You may consider me as a new reader of ARGOSY. Of course I have read it occasionally for several years—as have most people who care for first-rate fiction—but I have been a steady reader only about a year. Due to your policy of running at least two serials in each issue, one must read ARGOSY constantly to really appreciate it. And I would say that in its serials lies ARGOSY'S strength.

I have a degree from Texas Tech in journalism and I have some pride in my taste in fiction. ARGOSY is one of two pulps that I read religiously (the other is one of the fantastics), but I never hide my copies of ARGOSY for fear some of my literary friends will see them.

Now, belatedly, I come to the thought that really prompted this letter. In a recent issue you stated that costume-story fans were lax in raising their voices. Well, I raise mine now as a disciple of Dumas, Scott, Cooper, Sabatini.

So far, in my first year's acquaintance with you, I haven't been too well satisfied with your offerings in the costume field. The series of which "Rakehelly Ride" was one (I forget the author's name) was very good; but I didn't care so much for Roy de S. Horn or Johnston McCulley (even though he is a sort of relative of mine). I understand that Captain Hornblower, whom I recently saw in one of the slicks, is an ARGOSY character. Maybe we could have some more of his adventures?

CRANE, TEXAS

Looking Ahead!

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ARTHUR LAWSON

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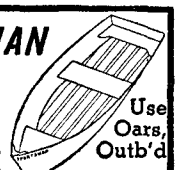

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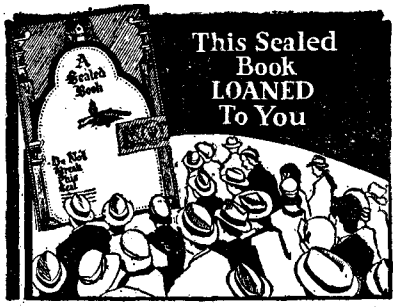

THOUSANDS EVERYWHERE ACCLAIM THIS

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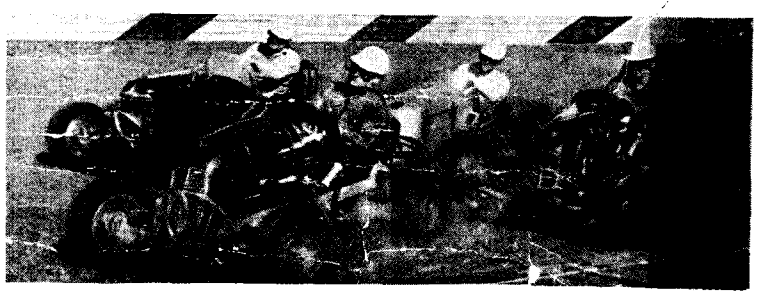

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